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THE STORY OF THE PASSION

ITS OWN MESSAGE CONSIDERED IN ADDRESSES

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PREFACE

THE purpose of these Addresses is to elucidate the history of our Lord's Passion from the words of the Evangelists alone. They are not written with a dogmatic, nor with a directly devotional object; though it is hoped they may both support Christian doctrine, and promote devotion. But their motive is simply to bring out into clear light the words that were uttered, and the deeds that were done, during that solemn day, as told in faithful narratives, and to leave those words and deeds to tell their own story, and make their own revelation. In the course of that Passion, the Lord Jesus Christ was challenged, in the face of the Cross and on the Cross, to avow what His work and Mission had been, and to declare who He was. We are listening in this story to no other message, not to that of Apostles nor of the Church, but simply to His own; and whoever would know in substance what Jesus Christ came to say and do on earth may learn it here from His own dying lips. His work was carried forward by the Resurrection and Ascension which followed. But here is revealed, in letters of His own blood, His Personal Nature and Character, His Mission and His Revelation. The Gospels narrate what passed without comment,

and the facts themselves thus reveal their own meaning to the world. Those words and deeds bring us into the heights and depths of Divine and Human Life, and they afford the best evidence of our Christian Faith. He who has duly followed our Lord through these scenes of His Passion will have "seen the Lord," and will understand something of what it means to accept or to reject Him.

The Addresses have been given year by year in Holy Week during the nineteen years I have been in Canterbury; and this circumstance will explain, and I hope excuse, some repetitions which will be found in them. As there were intervals of a year, or even years, between some of them, it was requisite to recall on a subsequent occasion considerations which had been equally essential previously.

I must mention my great obligations to Dr. Nebe's *Leidensgeschichte*, which contains an admirably comprehensive review of the comments on this sacred subject by the greatest Saints and Divines of the Church from the earliest days, through the Middle Ages and the Reformation, down to modern commentators and critics. I should hardly have dared to publish anything on the subject without thus listening to the meditations of this great company of interpreters.

CANTERBURY,
February, 1922.

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THE STORY OF THE PASSION

I

THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

"And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives."—St. Matthew xxvi. 30.

St. Mark xiv. 26–31.
St. Luke xxii. 31–39.
St. John xviii. 1, 2.

I PROPOSE in these addresses to offer some meditations on the story of our Lord's Passion; and must commence with a prayer that He may graciously grant us the help of His Spirit, to open our minds and hearts, and enable us to appreciate, in some little measure, the revelation which that story affords. It is a revelation both of His nature and of our own, of the sin and wickedness of human nature, but above all of Him, of His love, of His sacrifice, and of His saving power. There are depths in the story which no human mind can fathom; but they are depths of light; and gleams from them may flash into our souls, illuminating our sinful condition and His Divine work as our Saviour.

Now the story of the Passion, strictly speaking, may be said to commence with the moment when our Lord "went forth with His disciples over

the brook Kedron," after He had spoken His farewell words of comfort to them, and offered His final prayer of Priestly self-sacrifice to His Father. That solemn moment is expressly marked in each of the Gospels in the passages above mentioned. "When they had sung an hymn," say St. Matthew and St. Mark, "they went out into the Mount of Olives." According to St. Luke, "He came out, and went, as He was wont, to the Mount of Olives"; and St. John says, "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the Brook Kedron, where was a Garden, into which He entered with His disciples. And Judas also which betrayed Him knew the place, for Jesus oft-times resorted thither with His disciples." Our Lord knew, as St. John says, that "His hour was come when He should depart out of this world unto the Father." He had said everything that was possible to prepare His disciples for His departure. When, therefore, they left the upper room and went out towards Gethsemane, the final scene opened, and the Passion had begun. Our Lord deliberately adhered to His custom to go to Gethsemane for rest, meditation, and prayer, knowing that the traitor Judas would count on finding Him there, and so betray Him to the Jewish authorities. Accordingly, He at once warns His disciples that the critical hour of which He had often spoken,

had come, and warns them also that they will all be offended in Him.

Now this is the first point of importance which it is essential for us to realise, and steadily to bear in mind, if we are at all to apprehend our Lord's position and conduct throughout the scenes of His Passion. It is evident that He knew perfectly, and fully realised, everything that was going to happen. He said to His disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night, for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen I will go before you into Galilee": and then, in answer to an indignant self-assertion of St. Peter, He specifically predicts that St. Peter would thrice deny Him. It seems, in the first place, particularly worth observing from this fact that it affords striking and unquestionable evidence of our Lord's superhuman character. What but a Divine Omniscience could know so exactly beforehand what was about to happen—the very evening on which it would happen, the conduct which His disciples would display, and even so particular an incident as that Peter, the most confident of them all, would deny Him thrice before the cock crew? We shall see, as we proceed in further meditations, how this foreknowledge affects the whole relation of our Lord to His sufferings, and puts a complexion on them which

renders them absolutely distinct in character from those of any Martyr or Saint who ever lived. He foresees, with absolute clearness, that He is to be betrayed by one of His disciples, deserted by all, denied persistently by the foremost of them; and, knowing and distinctly realising all this, He proceeds with perfect calmness to expose Himself to the circumstances in which it could all be carried into effect, and deliberately to refuse any means of escape or deliverance. His subsequent exclamation, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of Angels?" is decisive on this momentous fact. He was subjected to no superior force whatever in the matter, but, knowing what was coming upon Him, and having full power to resist and defeat it, if He had chosen to exert the power, He deliberately refused to do so, and surrendered Himself as a victim to His enemies. No mere man could have done that, and the simple words, therefore, which have been read to you this morning are alone sufficient to vindicate the central belief of the Church that our Lord was not a Man as other men are, but was one with the Father by Whom all things are determined, and to Whom all things consequently are known.

But let us contrast this Divine knowledge in our Lord Himself with the position of His disciples,

and a merciful light will be thrown upon the conduct which our Lord foresaw in them. It is very difficult for us, who are familiar with the whole story to the end, to realise the position in which they found themselves as the course of the Passion was developed. They had none of our Lord's foreknowledge, and although He had given them distinct warnings beforehand of the general character of the fate which was before Him, such a prospect was so inconsistent with the existing circumstances of His life, that it is very natural they should have been unable to realise its possibility. Had He not, only a few hours before, been welcomed in Jerusalem as the Messiah who came in the Name of the Lord? Had He not exercised Messianic authority in the Temple? Had He not assumed the royal and judicial right of denouncing the sins and corruptions of the Scribes and Pharisees? Had He not been exerting the most gracious of miraculous powers? How were they to imagine that their Master, their Lord and their King, was going to be actually betrayed to His enemies by one of themselves; that He was going quietly to submit to that betrayal, to allow Himself to be bound as a common robber, and seized by a band of common soldiers? That alone, before His subsequent condemnation and death, was enough to stagger their faith, and to rouse in them a feeling

that all their hopes had been delusive, that their Master was not really what they had believed Him to be. We should not think too hardly of the disciples in this matter. It may, I think, be safely said that no faith was ever exposed to such a terrible trial as was that of the disciples, when the Lord, on Whose royal and Divine power they had fixed such confident hopes, suddenly surrendered to a dastardly betrayal.

If St. Peter's denial is peculiarly shocking, it may be remembered that to St. Peter the shock was probably greater than to any one else. The very confidence and vehemence of his faith in his Master, and the depth of his love for Him, would make the revelation all the more terrible when that Master and Lord suddenly exhibited such weakness and helplessness as was shown on this evening. It is true our Lord had spoken of His resurrection, and that too on this very occasion; but when we remember that no example of such a resurrection had been known in previous history, is it wonderful that Peter and his fellow-disciples failed to realise what it meant, and its very possibility? Within an hour or two of our Lord's uttering the calm words of victory, "I have overcome the world," the world appeared to them to have completely overcome Him. We are told in St. Luke that during the Last Supper itself

there arose a dissension among the disciples which of them should be accounted the greatest in their Lord's Kingdom. Those were the thoughts with which their minds were filled—unworthy, no doubt, but only too natural; and it was with such thoughts in their minds that they passed to the amazing scene, in which our Lord suddenly placed Himself in the position, not of a King, but of a Criminal.

May we not reasonably think that the very calm, with which our Lord indicates to them what their conduct would be, indicates a merciful apprehension of these circumstances? He does not seem to speak in terms of rebuke or reproach, but only warns them of the fact; and perhaps the very circumstance that He gives them this warning may have served as some reassurance to them in the revulsion which must have come upon them when that terrible scene was over. The thought may well and justly have occurred to their minds that He must have known their weakness, and have made allowance for them; and the fact would also have been further evidence to them of His Divine foreknowledge. "Now," He had said, "I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye may believe." This consideration of the severe strain that was thus brought on the disciples may partly account for the gentleness of our Lord's subsequent rebuke to St. Peter. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou

Me more than these ? " He knew and appreciated the fact that St. Peter did really love Him, and that the trial to which he was exposed was greater than human nature could bear. We are perhaps too apt to think that St. Peter's denial was due simply to cowardice ; but together with whatever there may have been of that weakness, there was also the fact that Peter's faith in our Lord's power and nature had received a fearful shock by the circumstances of His betrayal and surrender to His enemies. It is worth while to dwell on these circumstances, not merely as it lessens somewhat the dark shadow which otherwise would rest on the Apostles whom Jesus had Himself chosen, and whose names we venerate, but because it illustrates the profound justice and mercy of our Saviour's judgment of them, and consequently of His judgment of us all. He took account, though we might not, of the severe temptations to which they were exposed, and mercifully forgave them beforehand. He declares to them, in the very prediction of their desertion of Him, that He would meet them again as their Shepherd. " All ye shall be offended because of Me this night : for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered. But after I am risen I will go before you into Galilee." When they had deserted Him and were in despair, and thought that all their hopes were defeated, He would meet them once

more in their old familiar scenes in Galilee, and the sheep would be gathered once more to their Good Shepherd. These few words are surely an amazing, but a most consoling, exhibition of foreknowledge and calm judgment, and of unbounded mercy.

Let me add one application of these circumstances to our own experience. Notwithstanding all that our Lord had taught them, we find the disciples exposed to experiences which seemed to them utterly inconsistent with the character of their Master, with His promises, and with what they believed respecting His nature and will. The strain was too much for them, and their faith failed; but they were exposed to this strain by the deliberate action of their Saviour, in the necessary carrying out of His Divine purposes for Himself, for them, and for the world. Is it not so also in the daily experience of life? Circumstances come upon us which seem to us inconsistent with the goodness of God, with His power and love. Men and women are exposed to trials and temptations which are to them inexplicable, and their faith is apt to sink under the strain. "Could such things happen," they say, "if God were all-powerful and all good?" So it was with the disciples on this occasion. Yet the things which happened to them that evening, the disasters which scattered and offended them, were simply

passages in a wonderful scheme of redemption, which in a few weeks was to be plain to them, and for which they were able to render infinite thanks to God and to their Saviour. If ever such experiences come upon ourselves, let us remember the example of the disciples. Let us be assured that all is in the hands of the Saviour and His Father, and that He has gone before us to meet us hereafter in the Heavenly Galilee, where all His sheep will be gathered hereafter under His loving hand.

II

GETHSEMANE

"And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and He saith to His disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.

"And He taketh with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy." St. Mark xiv. 32, 33.

St. Matthew xxvi. 36–38.
St. Mark xiv. 32–34.
St. Luke xxii. 40.

Our Lord's warning to the disciples of the temptation which was before them, which we considered yesterday, was spoken on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, and when they reached it, He bade His disciples to sit down while He went on further to pray; but He selected three of them, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, to go on with Him. They were the same three whom He had taken with Him up the Mount of Transfiguration, where they saw Him in glory, talking with Moses and Elias, and speaking of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. That wonderful spectacle ought to have been an assurance to them, as it was no doubt intended to be, against yielding to despair in the trial which was now approaching. He had expressly taken that occasion to tell them of

His approaching death and of His subsequent resurrection. We are told in St. Mark that, as they came down from the Mountain, Jesus charged them that they should tell no man of the things they had seen "till the Son of Man were risen from the dead." But St. Mark adds that the saying was beyond their comprehension. "They kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean." It was, in fact, impracticable for these marvellous and mysterious events to be appreciated before they had happened; and the effect of our Lord's prophetic warning was only realised afterwards, when the events had occurred; and as the disciples looked back, they apprehended both the Divine foresight, and the Divine and human deliberation, with which our Lord had carried through His Father's will. Though they did not produce an adequate effect at the time, they did produce it afterwards; and they are an assurance of incalculable value to ourselves, as well as to the disciples, of our Lord's nature and character. These things He told His disciples before they came to pass, that when they did come to pass both they and we might believe. Of all the miraculous manifestations in the Gospels there is perhaps none greater than this, that in a scene like the Transfiguration, and thenceforward, the course and the conclusion of our Lord's Passion was

clearly present to His Own Mind, and sufficiently declared to His chief Apostles.

But now that the hour was come, we witness a manifestation in our Lord's own Soul which is of the most touching and unexpected character. He "was withdrawn," we read, from the three disciples "about a stone's cast," and there is a striking force in the expression. The word seems to express some forcible withdrawal, as though He would fain have retained their companionship, but some irresistible force drew Him away from them, as St. Matthew says, "to be sorrowful and very heavy," or as St. Mark says, "to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy." "Greatly amazed and sore troubled," as the Revised Version translates it; and this great amazement and sore trouble was more than He could share even with His most beloved and most trusted disciples. But we must be sensible what an extraordinary spectacle it is that the Saviour, Who had just been warning His disciples with the utmost calmness of what was coming upon Him, should now in a few moments be Himself the victim of this fear, this amazement, and this overwhelming trouble. "My soul," He said, "is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Tarry ye here and watch." What was it that brought this tremendous and almost mortal passion upon His soul? It has surprised many Christians, and has still more

surprised the world, that the greatest of all martyrs should be contemplating His fate with a fear, an amazement, and a trouble which were not seen in many of His followers at the approach of their trials and torments. The Christian will indeed not expect to appreciate fully the emotions and the thoughts of the Saviour. But one consideration should be sufficient to remove from our minds any sense of strangeness in this manifestation. It is the consideration which I mentioned yesterday, as the one which should be predominant with us in meditating on the whole of these transactions. I mean the fact, which is made plain by our Lord's predictions, that the whole course of His Passion, with all that it involved, was present to His mind and fully realised. To an ordinary martyr or sufferer, nothing but the general nature of his suffering can be present to his mind; nor can he realise in any considerable degree the motives of the actors in his tragedy, or the consequences to themselves. But the whole of these circumstances were visible and distinctly apprehended by our Saviour, as soon as ever His mind was concentrated upon them, as it had now begun to be. He knew, for He had told His disciples, not merely that He would be put to death, but that He would be betrayed by one of His Own Apostles, that He would be mocked and spitefully entreated, and spitted upon, and delivered to the Gentiles, and

crucified, with all the ignominy and shame which that crucifixion involved. He foresaw His complete desertion by His followers, and the awful loneliness of those long hours of agony. He saw His denial by one of those very Apostles who were His companions in this hour of temptation, and He appreciated the bitterness which it would all involve, not only to Himself but to them. Moreover, as His cry of dereliction on the Cross is sufficient to reveal to us, there were experiences of spiritual misery before Him, beyond what any soul of man had ever known; and all this, as we know from His own words to His disciples, was vividly present to His mind, and "the iron entered into His soul."

But other considerations were also before that omniscient Eye. He realised that His betrayal by Judas, His formal condemnation by the Chief Priests and Rulers, the rejection of Him as the Messiah and King of the Jews, and His surrender to the Gentiles, meant the final self-condemnation of the Jews themselves, the failure of His Father's long discipline of them, and their abandonment to the wrath of God. If we would measure what He would have, in this respect, suffered, in this hour of agony, we must recall one of the most pathetic of all passages in the Gospels, which describes how, when He came near Jerusalem, He wept over it, saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy

peace ! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the day shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee ; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another ; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." When those pathetic words were spoken, the die had not yet been finally cast. Our Lord's final appeals to His people, in the magnificent series of parables and exhortations which followed, had yet to be made, and their fate was not yet sealed : but when our Lord entered the Garden of Gethsemane, all such appeals were over. He came in that Garden to the final resolution to make no more appeals to them ; neither exhortations nor denunciations were thenceforth to pass His lips, but He was to be led as a lamb to the slaughter. The resolution He had to come to on that evening was to resist His enemies no longer, but to leave them to the worst of all dooms—that of having their own way, and going their own road to destruction. The doom fell upon them of which the Psalmist speaks, " So He gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations." In murdering Him, they destroyed themselves, and their nation, and their spiritual life ; and their own awful cry, not long after, " His blood be on us and on our

children," with the fearful doom it involved, was now present with its full force and distress to the Saviour's mind. Could the heart that wept over Jerusalem, before its fate was sealed, have failed to be torn with anguish when that fatal hour had come ?

Our Lord, moreover, appreciated, as no one has ever done before or since—as, by His mercy, no one ever yet could—the awful character of the sins which had culminated in this disaster. The world does not, and cannot fully, realise the evil that was manifested in the rejection and condemnation of Christ by His Own people. It is strange that one of the nearest approaches to such realisation was made beforehand by the greatest moral teacher of antiquity. It was Plato, who predicted that if ever a really perfect man came into the world, he would be hated and rejected, and finally put to death by an execution equivalent to crucifixion. What a fearful revelation was this of the true character of human nature—of that human nature of which we speak so often, nowadays, with such complacency and confidence ! It was no theologian, but a heathen observer, who charged it with having such an innate hatred of goodness, that it could only endure goodness under a disguise, and, as it were, with some sort of alloy : but that if absolute goodness was displayed before it, it would reject it with hatred and ignominy. That, in

an aggravated form, and with an infinitely deeper sense of all it means, our Lord saw and realised in this awful hour. He Himself was Goodness Incarnate. He was, in moral and spiritual truth, "the likeness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His Person"—the likeness and the express image of all truth and holiness and beauty. We appreciate that manifestation, in some measure, as we read it in the Gospels, but the Jews of His day had seen and experienced it. The Life had been manifested, says St. John, and they had seen It with their eyes, looked upon It, and their hands had handled It, and now they were about finally to reject It, and so far as they could, to cast It from them. Could one who, like our Lord, looked on the spectacle with the full appreciation of it which was afforded by His Divine knowledge, do otherwise than fear and be amazed, and sore troubled at such an awful spectacle?

To Him, moreover, the Son of Abraham and the Son of David, the Flower of His race, its Priest and Prophet and King, the spectacle must have been infinitely aggravated by all the previous history. For nearly two thousand years had God been trying to train this people to the knowledge and obedience and love of Himself. He had, as our Lord reminded them, again and again sent prophets and kings to lead them to Him; His Spirit had inspired that grand series of Scriptures

which, St. Paul said, were able to make them wise unto salvation; miracles and wonders and signs had accompanied their history from the first; and the most gracious promises had been held out for their encouragement. But all this was now to be proved futile. For the great mass of the nation, all the Divine efforts had failed. It was not merely that human nature itself had exhibited this weakness and wickedness, but that human nature under Divine guidance and special Divine help had similarly failed. All this agony of corruption was present to our Lord's mind at this moment; and it is before this accumulated spectacle of human evil and malicious wickedness, that He is pressed with fear and amazement and sore trouble. One thing more must be added: that our Lord was practically about to pronounce its doom, and to seal its condemnation, by His own action; for He was about deliberately to abstain from any action, either by word or by force, which would prevent the crime being consummated. That was the resolve He had to make. He could, as He said, have appealed to His Father to give Him twelve legions of angels. If so, He could also by some exercise of spiritual force have broken those stern wills, and prevented their proceeding to the full realisation of their iniquity. It may well be that, in that agony in which drops of blood were forced from Him, He was praying not only for Himself,

but for others, praying, like Moses before Him, that, at any rate, His people might be spared. But in the mysteries of the Divine Will, it was foreordained that it was only by this means, by leaving human nature to develop its full evil, and by the consequent sacrifice of our Lord, that that evil could be ultimately overcome, and an adequate atonement offered for its sins. The conflict in our Lord of these two influences, and of the two wills, which consequently arose in Him, must be considered subsequently. Let us be content for the present to have attempted to realise in some slight degree, the spiritual and moral realities which thus brought our Lord into this agony, as they were brought home at the critical hour to His mind and heart.

It will be well if we learn one lesson from them: the lesson, namely, of the fearful issues which are at stake in the moral struggle which is around us, and which goes on in our own souls. Those moral struggles, those sins, have been proved by this experience to involve the consequences which are depicted with such terrible vividness in the story of the Saviour's agony. The sins of His people, the sins of His followers, had brought Him into the position in which His soul was "exceeding sorrowful even unto death." Ask yourselves whether you think of them seriously enough, whether you realise, as you would wish

to do, what all sin involves to the Heart of Christ, and to the Heart of God, as it is revealed in Christ. Ask whether you realise that your own sins, and the sins of those around you, if not checked in time, may culminate in some great crisis which, to you and those you love, may be like the ruin of His nation to our Lord; and if not, if you are sensible that you have never realised them in the intensity which this scene in the Garden reveals, resolve at least that you will struggle against them with a new energy, and so let the Saviour see some fruit of the travail of His Soul and be comforted.

III

GETHSEMANE

"And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy."—St. Matthew xxvi. 37.

St. Matthew xxvi. 39–46.
St. Mark xiv. 35–42.
St. Luke xxii. 41–46.

These passages exhibit a striking illustration of the extreme simplicity and brevity of the Evangelical narratives. In the fewest possible words they convey to us an account of what was evidently a prolonged, and, in our Lord's own description, mortal struggle and agony—"even unto death." It is, in this respect, like the account of our Lord's temptation at the outset of His ministry; when the struggle with the tempter, which was prolonged over forty days and nights, is summarily narrated in a few short verses, and concentrated in three questions and answers. This inspired brevity and concentration enable us in each case to grasp the essential point of the issue, and save us from being distracted over merely circumstantial details. But we have, at the same time, to be on our guard against treating acts and words so briefly related with any shortness of thought or

meditation. The few statements in which the two great temptations of our Lord are described —that at the outset of His ministry, and that in the Garden of Gethsemane—ought to be meditated upon as revealing the very essence of His mind and heart, and we should endeavour to realise, in some measure, what must have been its full expression in His experience.

We endeavoured to do this yesterday, in some degree, with one statement from which all these narratives start—that our Lord began to be very sorrowful, sore amazed, and very heavy. We pass now to the manner in which this great amazement and deep depression manifested itself, and we should first observe that it was no mere momentary agony which followed. This is evident from the simple fact that, on returning to His three disciples, He found them asleep. It is inconceivable that these three chosen disciples, having been selected by our Lord to follow Him to the very shrine of His bitterest temptation, should have fallen asleep, almost instantly, during the few moments which would have been required for the utterance of the brief prayer which is recorded. He says Himself, on His first return to them, "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?"; and then He goes away a second time, and says the same brief words, and it immediately follows, "He came and found them asleep again: for their

eyes were heavy." Then He goes away a third time, and exclaims on His return, "Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand." St. Luke tells us that it was not, as indeed we cannot conceive it to have been, mere drowsiness, still less indifference, which occasioned this strange inability to watch with the Saviour. "When He rose up from prayer," says St. Luke, "and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow, and said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

That simple expression "for sorrow" illuminates the whole scene. There is one very touching expression of our Saviour addressed to His disciples, according to St. Luke, at the institution of the Holy Communion, and therefore with a special reference to these scenes. "Ye are they," He said, "which have continued with Me in My temptations." That expression touches a deep human chord. It is with those who have shared with us the strain and trials and temptations of life, and who have sympathised with us in them, that our hearts are most closely bound. These three disciples had been specially selected by our Lord to share this final temptation with Him, and to them He had opened His grief and amazement and heaviness. It is a satisfaction to be assured by St. Luke that their failure to watch with Him throughout that agony was due in great measure to the

depth of their sympathy. It had been a day and an evening of profound emotion and of trial for their hearts, and the vision of their Master's distress overpowered their physical frames. Our Lord Himself recognises the fact with His usual gentle equity, when He adds to His pathetic appeal: "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?" the merciful consideration, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." But what a length and strain of mental agony on our Lord's Own part is involved in this fact, that the disciples, though with all their sympathy moved to the depths, anxious to continue with our Lord in His temptations, yet were physically unable to endure the long strain! They witnessed, for they recorded, the expressions of our Lord's agony—His not merely kneeling, but falling on His face in the attitude of the deepest humility, distress, and supplication. They say how, in His agony, He prayed more earnestly until His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground, and they were also privileged to see that an angel appeared unto Him from Heaven strengthening Him: but the strain was prolonged too far for their human capacities, and they sank exhausted into sleep. Nothing, surely, can give us a more vivid conception of the intensity, the prolonged intensity, of the Saviour's struggle on this occasion. To face all those spiritual as well as physical miseries, of which we yesterday

endeavoured to understand a little, and to resolve finally to surrender Himself to the whole power of evil, to endure whatever might be inflicted upon Him, to allow all the fearful consequences, which were inevitable, to fall on His people, on His disciples,—may we not add, on His Mother ?—the final victory over this temptation was beyond the sympathy of any other soul, even of the beloved disciple himself.

But how did He meet that temptation and overcome it ? He met it by prayer. It is our privilege to have recorded for us one prayer, in which the whole struggle of His soul was concentrated. During that long time, perhaps those long hours, the cravings and the strain of His Spirit must have expressed themselves in various ways, but just as the whole of His preaching is summed up in one expression, " The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," so the whole of His spiritual struggle at this time is summed up in the one sentence, " O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." The form is a little varied from time to time, but the substance is always the same, " Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done." This prayer has justly been the subject of the most anxious meditation and discussion, for it reveals the soul of

the Saviour in the most intense moment of His life, and enables us to penetrate into the very centre of His mind and heart. That which has especially exercised the thoughts of those who have discussed it and meditated upon it is the evident existence in our Lord's soul of two distinct affections or wills, each in the highest degree. We see, in the first place, the most intense shrinking in His human nature from the stern and terrible duty which was laid upon Him. There is no mere reluctance. It is an intense struggle which is revealed to us. The Saviour's human nature contemplated, by the light of His Divine foreknowledge, all that was before Him, in all its details and consequences, and struggled against it; and He revolted from it with His whole strength, with a force and intensity which impelled Him to prostrate Himself on the ground, and forced drops of blood from His Brow. In the presence of those three disciples, He does not shrink from exhibiting the whole of His weakness, this mortal dread.

It may be permitted us to observe, in passing, that there is one characteristic of our Saviour's words at this period of His life which is peculiarly impressive. It is the perfect freedom and fullness with which He reveals Himself. You see Him, in the course of the few days of His final visit to Jerusalem, opening His heart and mind almost

without reservation, and passing from one emotion to another with equal self-abandonment. You see Him, for instance, in His controversies with the Pharisees and His denunciations of them, "Making way to His indignation, and casting on them all the furiousness of His wrath, anger, displeasure, and trouble." Then you follow Him in His farewell discourses with His disciples, speaking to them in a wholly different tone, a tone so natural to the occasion, of gentle familiarity and tender discourse, soothing and comforting and supporting them. Is it not strange that people should have found any difficulty in the fact that the style of our Lord's address to His disciples in those chapters of St. John is so very different from that of His public utterances to the Jews? Is it not one of the most gracious revelations of Himself, that He could pass in a few hours from the stern language of His public duty to the tender and profound consideration of those parting words?

Just so now, He throws off all reserve, and utters His whole Heart, all its agony, all its dread, and at the same time, all its deep filial faithfulness, in the hearing of His beloved disciples. But in thus revealing Himself so fully before them, he has mercifully revealed Himself also to us, and the sum and substance of what He has exhibited in this marvellous record is the essence of human weakness and temptation, and the method and

spirit in which those who share His nature may meet it. Behind all this fear and agony is fixed the cardinal principle on which His whole Soul rests—that of doing His Father's Will. "Wist ye not," He had said as a child, to His Mother, "that I must be about My Father's business?" That is the germ of which the full fruit appears in this reiterated exclamation with which He meets His final temptation: "Not My will but Thine be done." He does not shrink from confessing to His Father, or confessing before His disciples, that His whole nature shrank from the trial. He lays bare His whole heart to God, and does not shrink from doing so in the sight of men, and allows His Father and ourselves to see how the flesh struggled with the Spirit. His words to His disciples, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak," are evidently the reflection of His own experience at that moment. The difference between Him and them was that His spirit was stronger than the flesh, and theirs was not.

Is there anything more precious to us, in view of the experiences of real life, than thus to have had revealed to us that Christ Himself, our perfect Lord and Saviour, experienced with such intensity the struggle between the spirit and the flesh, between the will of God and the inclinations of

our human nature, which constitutes the struggle of all our lives, so far as we are brought into the depths of temptation at all? It tells us that in every such temptation we share only His experience. The renunciation and endurance He had to maintain was, of course, infinitely greater than ours, as the spiritual force which He possessed was also infinitely greater: but in essence, our temptations are His temptations; and with this spectacle before us we are assured of the truth that "we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." From that point of view, it is surely also an immense comfort to us to learn from His example that the only way to overcome such temptations is by prayer, and that in that prayer we need not shrink from opening our whole hearts to God, telling Him without reserve not merely our difficulties, but our weaknesses, not shrinking from laying bare everything before Him, even with strong crying and tears, provided only we accompany every confession and every appeal with the settled supplication, "Not my will but Thine be done." The conflict of wills and affections of which we must be continually sensible in ourselves is unavoidable. As with our Saviour Himself, it must last to the very end of their lives, even in the best and most saintly men, and it need never

make us out of heart in our spiritual life if we find ourselves unable to repress it. We can never know, moreover, when it may arise, and there is but one protection against it. To this unique example of the struggle of a Divinely endowed human nature against the weakness of the flesh, our Saviour added the gracious blessing of applying it directly to His disciples. "Watch and pray," He said to them, "lest ye enter into temptation." Their hour was about to come. When He ended speaking, the betrayer and his band were at hand, and the temptation came upon the disciples in full force, and they yielded to it at once. They had not, like the Saviour, realised what its intensity would be, and they had therefore lacked the spiritual energy to maintain the watchfulness and the prayerfulness, which alone would have enabled them to overcome it. While learning patience and consolation from His gracious example, let us learn also a lesson from theirs. Let our meditation on this solemn scene deepen in us a determination to be perpetually on the watch and perpetually in prayer, ever sensible of the weakness of the flesh, and ever depending on the Divine grace to overcome it.

IV

THE BETRAYAL

"And when He rose up from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow,

"And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." St. Luke xxii. 45, 46.

St. Matthew xxvi. 47–56.
St. Mark xiv. 43–52.
St. Luke xxii. 47–53.

The scene which is thus described to us by the four Evangelists, followed immediately upon the solemn and moving circumstances which we considered yesterday. Each of the three Evangelists emphasises this fact. "While He yet spake," says St. Matthew, "lo, Judas, one of the twelve came." St. Mark, still more emphatic, says, "Immediately, while He yet spake, cometh Judas." St. Luke, "While He yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas . . . went before them." There is indeed something very wonderful in the immediate transition in respect to our Lord's conduct. For a time, which as we saw yesterday must have been at least one or two hours, if not more, our Saviour had given Himself up—I had almost said abandoned Himself—to the intensest agony of soul, prostrating Himself on the ground,

praying with strong crying and tears, until His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood, needing the support of an Angel from Heaven to strengthen Him, and supplicating His Father three times over that, if it were possible, the cup about to be presented to His lips might pass from Him, and three times over having to renew the submission which was the final resolve of His soul, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." The calm with which He had consoled His disciples in the Upper Chamber, and with which, as they walked to Gethsemane, He had predicted what was about to come upon Him and them, had completely given way, and His soul and body both were shaken to their foundations in a great spiritual agony. But at length, after the third temptation, the victory is won, and a final and a great calm returns upon His soul. He says to His disciples, "Sleep on now, and take your rest." He has passed beyond the need even of that sympathy which, in His perfect humanity, He had craved from His three chosen companions. He asks no more from them, but faces the enemies who were approaching. "Rise," He exclaims, "let us be going. Behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me." Think of the Saviour at one moment prostrated on the ground in mortal struggle with the weakness of the flesh, and in the next moment erect before His enemies, independent of His chosen Apostles, and in St.

John's words going forth and "knowing all things that should come upon Him."

That sudden transition, that complete and final self-victory, thus marked by the Evangelists, strikes the keynote of all the coming scenes; and if we would understand the rest of the Passion, we must bear in mind this wonderful background of Gethsemane, and the supreme resolve of self-sacrifice which stands out against it. Nothing is more conspicuous, in the scene which follows, than our Saviour's absolute supremacy over all the circumstances and persons before Him. They are all perplexed and confused, and more or less panic-stricken. He is firm and calm and clear, and utters the exact word which is appropriate to each moment and to each person. First there comes that dreadful incident, so revolting that it is difficult to say one word upon it, of His Apostle, by a preconcerted sign with the band of soldiers whom he guided, coming straightway to Jesus, and saying, "Master, Master," and kissing Him. There is no more terrible saying of our Lord than that which He had spoken a few hours before, "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him, but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It had been good for that man if He had never been born." We read afterwards that Judas who had betrayed Him, "when he saw that He was condemned, repented himself and brought

again the thirty pieces of silver to the Chief Priests and Elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." It seems merciful to think that he may have entertained some strange notion that he was not really betraying his Master to death; but our Saviour's terrible sentence precludes the idea that there was any excuse for him, and at all events, this spectacle of his covering his betrayal with a kiss is too revolting to be dwelt upon. But the Saviour, with perfect calm, contents Himself with a few words which were fitted to pierce the soul of the traitorous Apostle with the bitterest remorse. "Friend," He said as he approached, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" and when the bitter kiss had been received, Jesus said unto him, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" That was all, but it was enough to cover Judas with ignominy.

Then our Lord turns to the band of men and officers from the Chief Priests and Pharisees, and instead of waiting for them to speak to Him, addresses them Himself. "Whom seek ye?" He said, and they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." "Jesus said unto them, I am He." St. John expressly adds at this point, that Judas also who betrayed Him stood with them. It may be that he mentions the fact at this point because those words "I am He" must at least have carried a profound meaning to the Apostle's mind. He had

heard our Saviour several times in His conversations with the Pharisees and Scribes utter that mysterious expression "I am He." "If," He had said, "if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." They were the words which our Saviour had used more than once to indicate His Divine origin and authority. Perhaps to a Jew they were an echo of the sacred Name "I am." At all events they were calculated to bring home to the soul of the false Apostle, as well as to any of the Pharisees who might have been present, what were the claims of the Person Whom the one was betraying, and the other seizing and intending to put to death. Then followed a revelation of the Divine authority and majesty which was at least involved in those two words. "As soon as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backwards and fell to the ground." What must have been the supreme dignity and authority with which the Lord must have spoken, in order to produce this effect by two words on a mere band of soldiers, a multitude with swords and staves! It makes it evident that He was the Master and Lord in that scene, and no one else. What a difference, again, between the prostrate, bleeding, and imploring Saviour of an hour before, and the majestic Figure, at Whose mere word determined leaders of the Jews, and soldiers unconcerned in the controversy, at once cowered and fell to the ground. There had been

other occasions when the Saviour had delivered Himself with ease from an enraged crowd, and this incident is enough to show that, had He chosen, He might even at this moment have delivered Himself from them. There was a Divine power and authority in His very look, and in His briefest words, which would have been sufficient to discomfit any force that might be brought against Him, even without those legions of Angels to which He had previously said He might have appealed. It is evident they are not seizing Him; He is surrendering Himself into their hands, and it is true of them, as He said to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above." This is perhaps the final proof of that cardinal truth on which it has been necessary to insist throughout these meditations, that, as the Saviour said of Himself, "No man taketh My Life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received from My Father."

But He had one special and gracious purpose in thus asserting His power over the soldiers before Him. Though He would surrender Himself, He was resolved to save His disciples, and when the soldiers had thus been forced to recognise their weakness before Him, He used the moment to charge them to let His disciples go free. "Then

asked He them again, Whom seek ye? and they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I am He. If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way: that the saying might be fulfilled which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none." Perhaps it was not the first obvious meaning of those words which He had in mind. When we consider the weakness which the Apostles had shown, it may be He knew that if they were arrested, and threatened with punishment or death, the strain upon their faith and allegiance might have been unsupportable, and they might have committed some irremediable act of apostasy. When we remember how Peter fell, even while retaining his freedom, we may dread to think what he and other Apostles might have done if they had been exposed to the temptation of actual imprisonment and the menace of death. Our Lord was, perhaps, resolved to save them from that danger, and therefore by an act and thought of infinite grace and love, He exerted His last act of authority to ensure their freedom. "Having loved His Own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

At that moment there was a revulsion in the mind of His Apostles. "When they which were about Him saw what would follow, they said unto Him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the High Priest

and cut off his right ear." It was Simon Peter who thus showed, as we may happily remember, that his declarations that he would lay down his life for his Master were not vain. He did, in fact, imperil his life irrecoverably, but for his Master's intercession, by that act of violence. But he was at once rebuked and restrained by our Lord, for three memorable reasons. First, that such resort to violence would recoil upon those who used it, and defeat itself. "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." To appeal to the sword is to leave the arbitrament to the sword; and apart from the fact that such resistance on the Apostles' part would have been futile, it would have prevented the arbitrament lying where it was essential it should lie, in spiritual and moral authority. The Church of Christ in its best days ever lived in accordance with that warning. Its blood was shed in torrents under cruel persecution; but even when Christians were something like half the population of the Empire, they never rose in insurrection against the Roman Emperors, and these words of our Saviour laid down a principle which must ever be obeyed by His followers. The second reason he alleged was that any such force was unnecessary for His deliverance. "Thinkest thou," He said, "that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of Angels?" Even if His own

authority and spiritual power had not been sufficient, as we saw it was, to deliver Him from His enemies, the armies of Heaven were at His command; but He would not use them, for the great and final reason which His agony had confirmed, that His Father had bidden Him to drink this cup. "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" It was His Father's will, even while hearing His agonising prayers, and sympathising with Him, and sending an angel to strengthen Him, that He should surrender Himself to the death and sacrifice which were before Him.

He mentioned to St. Peter also one evidence of His Father's will. "How then," He said, "should the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" It is impossible to pass by this saying, amidst the discussions which are around us in the present day respecting the Scriptures, without observing the supreme and solemn testimony which it bears to their authority. Our Lord had appealed to them on many occasions before. He had appealed to all parts of them, to the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms; to the Books of Moses, to Prophets like Zechariah, whom He had quoted on His way to Jerusalem; and His deepest feelings on the cross were expressed in utterances from the Psalms. But there is perhaps no such solemn appeal to them as is contained in this reference. This was the

great crisis of His life. It rested with Him entirely whether He should be seized by His enemies, and so submit Himself to the agony which followed. His Own Soul had struggled against the surrender, and His disciples were, after all, willing to sacrifice their lives at that moment in an endeavour to prevent it. But He adheres to His resolve, and the crucial reason He alleges is that it was His Father's will that He should do so, as revealed in the Scriptures. The Scriptures decide in our Lord's mind His submission to His Passion. In the face of such an appeal to the Scriptures by the Saviour, at this final moment, it must be unquestionable by those who believe in Him, not only that the Scriptures speak of Him, but that they contain an authoritative revelation from God Himself, respecting the Divine purposes in the most momentous matter of all. Accordingly, as our Lord appealed to the Scriptures as the command, as it were, for His Passion, His Apostles appealed to them for the explanation of it. Like their Master they appeal to the Scriptures, as "opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen from the dead." Any view of the Scriptures short of that is incompatible with the view of them taken and asserted by our Lord, at the most solemn moment of His life.

It remained only for our Lord to utter the rebuke which was deserved by the Chief Priests and

captains of the Temple and the Elders who were come to Him, "Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take Me? I was daily with you teaching in the Temple, and ye laid no hands upon Me." That was an unworthy method of attempting to crush One Who had ever boldly and calmly faced them. If they feared Him then, they might well have feared Him now, and it is evident they did; but once more He falls back upon the Scriptures, "But," He went on, "the Scriptures must be fulfilled." "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." And so He passed, master of Himself and of His enemies alike, and the Saviour of His Apostles, to drink the cup which His Father had assigned to Him. He passed with this calm determination to fulfil the grand purpose—the purpose of our salvation—upon which we shall meditate on Good Friday: but in doing so, let these meditations remind us that that salvation is due to the deliberate resolve of the Saviour to endure all this on our behalf, and let our hearts be proportionately stirred to gratitude and love.

V

THE DESERTION

"Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled."—St. Matthew xxvi. 56.

The few words in the text are the final and terrible touch in St. Matthew's account of the scene of our Lord's betrayal and seizure, and I would ask you to begin by reflecting a little on what this statement involves. To appreciate it, we must bear in mind what had preceded it. Perhaps, if it were considered by itself, the statement, however painful, is not altogether astonishing; but considered in connection with what had preceded it, there must appear something appalling in the light which it throws on the weakness of human nature. That which had preceded it, and preceded it immediately, had been our Lord's discourses to His disciples recorded in the fourteenth and two following chapters in St. John's Gospel. Our Lord and His disciples had passed immediately from the scene of those discourses, from those hours of the tenderest and deepest of all His communications with them, to the Garden of Gethsemane and to the moment of betrayal. He had

washed their feet in token of His love and condescension. He had given them the pledge of His Body and His Blood: He had appealed to them, "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me"; He had assured them of His Father's love and His own: He had said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"; He had warned them that the hour of sorrow and trial was at hand; He had told them, "These things have I spoken unto you that ye should not be offended." "I have told you," He said, "before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass ye might believe"; and His concluding words had been, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Reiterated assurances and exhortations of this kind were fresh from His lips and in their ears, and He had warned them of the temptation to which they were about to be exposed. "Ye," He had said, "shall be offended because of Me this night, for it is written, I will smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered." Peter, with his usual eager devotion, had instantly replied, "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I," and when our Lord, knowing, as St. John says, all that should come upon Him, had said, "Verily, I say unto thee, that this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice," Peter "spake the more vehemently, If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in

any wise." And it is added, "Likewise also said they all."

Could there possibly have been a more solemn preparation for the trial and test which was to follow? With the most solemn and tender of all His words ringing in their ears; with a clear and distinct warning from Him of the danger they were about to meet; with a solemn pledge elicited from their hearts and their lips at the very moment of the crisis, they enter at His side into the Garden where they had been listening to Him and prayed with Him. Even at the very last moment He gives them one more warning. When He was at the place He said unto them, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." Three of the disciples—Peter, John, and James—were taken by Him to be witnesses of His own spiritual agony. They were with Him, according to a touching expression He once used, "in His temptations." "Ye are they," He said, "which have continued with Me in My temptations." Is it possible to conceive of men being bound to their Master, in the crisis of His life, by bonds more close, more deep and tender, more pressing and immediate than these? If anything could add to these bonds, it would surely have been the spectacle of our Lord's Divine calm, and the assertion of His Divine authority in the presence of the officers, when they fell to the ground at His word and He

surrendered Himself by His own voluntary action. But the influence of all those sacred words and those warnings, and of that display of supreme majesty and patience, vanished in a moment, and even before He was actually seized, "they all forsook Him and fled."

It is some relief to a peculiarly painful incident in the sequel to reflect that this action of all the disciples ought to be borne in mind in judging of St. Peter's denial. That denial is subsequently brought into such prominence in the narrative, for various reasons, that there is some danger of our thinking of St. Peter as if he were the one example of faithlessness to our Lord. But the case is somewhat different, when we remember that all the disciples forsook Him and fled. Nay, there is, when this is borne in mind, something in St. Peter's action which redeems his first fault. Of those who thus forsook our Lord there were two who must have immediately turned back to follow Him. One was John; the other was Peter. It is a deep satisfaction to find that the beloved Apostle who, the evening before, had leaned on his Master's breast, was found immediately after our Lord's capture, if not at His side—which perhaps was impossible—yet at all events near Him in the very scene of danger. We read in the Fourth Gospel, that "Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto

the High Priest, and went in with Jesus into the Palace of the High Priest." As we know also that John was at the foot of the cross, we have the satisfaction of being assured that the Apostle who shared, in so peculiar a degree, our Lord's love was near Him from the beginning of His trial to the bitter end. If, as seems implied in the broad statement of the first two Evangelists, *all* the disciples, without exception, forsook Him and fled, in the first shock of our Lord's apparent defeat by the powers of darkness, the fault in the case of the beloved disciple was instantly repaired. He hurried after his Master to the High Priest's house, and availed himself of the privilege he possessed, as one of the High Priest's acquaintances, to be at any rate near Him. But it is surely some comfort, some alleviation at least of the stain afterwards left on human nature and on the name of a great Apostle, to know that Peter also followed Jesus, and though he had not the privilege of entry, he at least stood at the door without.

It was at this point that his first denial was made. "Then went out that other disciple which was known unto the High Priest and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this Man's disciples? He saith, I am not." It seems not an unreasonable suggestion of a very thoughtful Roman

Catholic commentator on these scenes, the late Father Coleridge, that St. Peter was, as it were, taken unawares by this sudden question of the portress who was letting him in, and meant at first, not so much a positive denial of our Lord, as a sort of evasive answer. He then found himself in a false position; and as the gravity of the conspiracy against our Lord's life revealed itself in the High Priest's house, he was tempted to the further and more vehement denials that followed. It must be supposed that John was especially cognisant of this sad fall of his brother Apostle, and it seems therefore that there is something touching in the fact that it is St. John, who, at the close of his Gospel, records our Lord's gracious welcome of the fallen Apostle, and his full reception to his Master's confidence. Bearing all this in mind, what we see in the case of St. Peter is not a mere desertion and a cold denial, but, in the first place, a great and daring effort to defend the Master in the Garden—for it is St. John again who tells us that St. "Peter having a sword, drew it, and smote the High Priest's servant, and cut off his right ear"—then, after a moment's desertion, another eager attempt to follow his Master, as though he would fain fulfil his own assurance, "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I": then a hasty negation, in reply to what perhaps seemed an impertinent question by the maid at

the door, and then at length, alas—when the bitter and determined antagonism of the Jewish authorities revealed itself—a shameful denial, with oaths and curses, into which he was betrayed, and which he instantly repented with bitter tears. It may be even permissible to take into account the fact that Peter may have apprehended that he would be recognised, in the High Priest's house, as the man who had cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant, and that he was the more tempted to conceal himself. But at all events a full consideration of these circumstances appears to make the whole scene more natural, more consonant with the character of an Apostle whose whole nature is elsewhere that of even over-eagerness and devotion; and it is a satisfaction to contemplate the great Apostle as really impelled to fulfil his assurance of faithfulness to his Master, and striving to do so, but overcome by an overwhelming, and at the outset, a sudden temptation.

But if this view of St. Peter's conduct be a just one, it will throw a light also on the action of the other disciples when they forsook our Lord and fled. We must bear in mind what an awe-inspiring authority they were confronted with, when the officers from the Chief Priests and Pharisees, from the sacred as well as the ruling authorities of their nation, seized our Lord by force, and He did not resist them. It is evident from Peter's

action that he thought our Lord would have resisted them, and when He did not, and was taken away as a captive, they may not unnaturally have thought, from a human point of view, that it was at all events vain to resist the official authority before them. It is true that having, as I began by pointing out, fresh in their minds the words of infinite grace and comfort, accompanied by Divine predictions as to what was going to come to pass, which our Lord had uttered within the last few hours, they ought to have been equal to the temptation, and have stood firmly and quietly by their Master's side. But instead of thinking hardly of them for their failure, we should do better to realise that it is but the most vivid instance, afforded in Christian history, of the danger to which we are all liable, and to which, in a greater or less degree, we most of us succumb. Is not too great a part of our spiritual life an illustration of similar failure to adhere to the deeper truths and convictions, which in sacred hours have been impressed upon our souls? Those profound, penetrating, loving, and forgiving words of our Lord ought to have struck a deep enough root in the hearts of the disciples to have rendered them proof against either fear or temptation, but they did not, and when the adverse power of evil confronted them in full force, they yielded to the pressure which their natural impulses of fear and self-preservation brought

to bear on them. But what else is the case when we ourselves have yielded or yield to some temptation of which we are afterwards ashamed? Are we not familiar with the words of our Lord which the disciples had heard? Are not numbers of other words, equally tender, solemn, and penetrating, echoing in our memories? And yet are they not all liable to be forgotten, as much almost as though we had never heard them, in the onset, sometimes sudden, sometimes insidious, of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life? Is not our constant danger that which is brought out with such force in George Herbert's sonnet:—

"Lord, with what care hast Thou begirt us round!
Parents first season us; then schoolmasters
Deliver us to laws; they send us bound
To rules of reason: holy messengers.

"Pulpits and Sundays, sorrow dogging sin,
Afflictions sorted, anguish of all sizes,
Fine nets and stratagems to catch us in,
Bibles laid open, millions of surprises,

"Blessings beforehand, ties of gratefulness,
The sound of glory ringing in our ears;
Without, our shame; within, our consciences;
Angels and grace, eternal hopes and fears:

"Yet all these fences, and their whole array,
One cunning bosom sin blows quite away."

Is not that a picture of human nature, drawn by the hand, not merely of a true pastor of souls,

but of a man who knew the world? And with this experience in our own hearts, and too common all around us, is it for us to judge hardly of the sudden failure of the disciples in their hour of temptation? Let us rather take to heart the warning which, with His constant compassion for the weakness and temptations of human nature, our Lord uttered to His disciples when the crisis approached. When He was at the place, He said unto them, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation"; and again when He found them asleep, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." The whole scene we have been contemplating is but a vivid comment on those words, and that is the chief lesson which we may derive from this contemplation.

But we also learn what to pray for. One of our Lord's promises, that evening, had been that He would send a Comforter to guide and strengthen them; and it was not until that Comforter had come, after His Ascension, that we find them—and Peter before them all—acting up to his assurance, "I am ready to go with Thee, both unto prison and unto death." That is the assistance that we all need, and that which we should pray for. No power but that of the Spirit of God Himself is strong enough to maintain in our souls the influence of the Saviour's words,

and ensure devotion to the Saviour's Person: but in proportion as He is with us to take of the things of Christ and to show them unto us, are we able to follow Him through the trials and temptations of life.

VI

BEFORE THE HIGH PRIEST

"Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?"—ST. JOHN xviii. 23.

THE words of our Lord when arraigned before the High Priest and the Roman Governor are in many respects of immense importance. In the first place, it adds supreme weight to them to reflect that they are spoken in the few hours which followed His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, and are thus uttered in the solemn light of that final surrender of Himself to His Father's will which was the conclusion of that agony. Moreover, as that agony shows, He entered, at His betrayal, upon the grand and final crisis of His life and work. This, as He exclaimed, was the hour of the power of darkness, and in that hour the whole struggle of His life was brought to its decisive issue. We cannot but see, therefore, in what He said at this crisis a final and concentrated revelation of His whole work and character, in antagonism to the powers of evil which gathered around Him for their final assault. What He claimed to be, and what His revelation is to men, is here exhibited

in a few brief and intense gleams of light, by which His life and death are vividly illuminated.

In considering those words, it will assist us to recall what He said and did at the moment of His apprehension. His position is revealed with the utmost solemnity by St. John. "Jesus," he tells us, "knowing all things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said unto them"—unto the band of soldiers and officers from the Chief Priests and Pharisees—"Whom seek ye?" He enters, therefore, upon these scenes knowing all things that were coming upon Him: not like a mere man, ignorant of the purposes of his enemies, or of the consequences of his own words and acts, but knowing beforehand exactly what would be the consequences of everything He said and did, and therefore saying and doing everything with full and clear deliberation. In answer to His question, "Whom seek ye?" they answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." "Jesus said unto them, I am He. As soon then as He had said to them I am He, they went backward and fell unto the ground." The words "I am He," which in the Greek are simply "I am," may in themselves have recalled the solemn Name of God, "I am that I am": but at all events there was something in that utterance and in the authority and majesty of the Lord which at once overpowered the officers. When He had said unto them "I am He" they

went backward and fell to the ground, helpless and unable to act. Again, therefore, He has to say to them, "Whom seek ye?" and they said again, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He. If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way. That the saying might be fulfilled which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me, have I lost none." Let us again observe that it is revealed by this incident, that it is our Lord, and not the band of soldiers and officers, with Whom the real power and force subsists. He has but to say a word and they are helpless, and He is able by that simple word to extend His protection over His disciples. Let us notice once more, in passing, the supreme grace with which, in the very moment of His Own self-surrender, He thinks first of saving His disciples, especially when, knowing all things, He knew that they were immediately about to desert Him. It was the first illustration, in this sense, of that gracious resolve with which He was taunted on the Cross by those who could not understand it: "He saved others: Himself He would not save."

This first incident, therefore, reveals to us the fact that all that follows—His seizure by the soldiers, His being bound, His trial, and all the insults that accompanied it—came to pass by His deliberate permission. No force could have been used to Him except by His own consent; and He

of His own will, in obedience to His Father's will, is throughout allowing His enemies and persecutors to have their way and to develop their own evil. It is a point which we must never forget in trying to understand the course and the significance of the Passion. Our Lord is not a martyr in the proper sense of the word, for a martyr is one who has no choice between yielding to his enemies and being put to death : but our Lord had, at every moment, the third course open to Him, of exerting His Divine power against His enemies, and justly avenging Himself upon them. But from the exertion of this power He deliberately abstained, in obedience to His Father, and in accordance with the revelation of His will in the Scriptures. How then, He exclaimed, " was the Scripture to be fulfilled, that thus it must be ? " and thus, by His own act, and not by the act of His enemies, He became a sacrifice to human sin.

In this solemn resolve, then, to allow wicked men to do unto Him whatsoever they would, He is brought to the priest's house, apparently the house both of Annas, a former High Priest, and of Caiaphas, his son-in-law. " They led Him," says St. John, " to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was High Priest that same year. Now Caiaphas," adds St. John, " was he which gave counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people " ; thus

reminding us at the outset that our Lord is now delivered up to the very man who had resolved on His death, and who had overridden the scruples of the Council by the prophetic declaration which, in his office as High Priest, he was empowered to make. It is not quite clear why He was first brought to Annas, but the father and the son-in-law were at one in their malignant conspiracy, and as we read at the end of the interview that Annas sent Him bound unto Caiaphas the High Priest, he must have had some authority to deal with the prisoner in the first instance. The influence of Annas, however, was dominant in the Jewish Government at this time, and when standing before him, our Lord was face to face with His great enemy, who must have thought, with a malignant satisfaction, that he now had in his power the great Prophet Whom he hated, and Whom he would have seized before, but that he feared the people. By the treachery of Judas, that fear had been evaded, and Jesus of Nazareth at length stood before him surrounded by his guard, and apparently helpless.

Caiaphas proceeds accordingly to examine his Prisoner. "The High Priest asked Jesus of His disciples and of His doctrine." His object, as illustrated again and again throughout the scenes which follow, was to obtain some admission from our Lord, which could be used for the purpose of procuring

His legal condemnation at the hand of the Roman Governor. Our Lord, therefore, practically adopts the position which, with one great exception, to be afterwards considered, He assumed throughout, that of refusing any reply. He speaks, but it is only to say that He has nothing to add to what He had said already. Jesus answered Him, "I spake openly to the world, I ever taught in the synagogues and in the Temple, whither the Jews always resort, and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? Ask them which heard Me what I have said unto them. Behold, they know what I said." It is not necessary to dwell on the supreme dignity of this reply. Our Lord would not submit to be examined and cross-examined by a Priest who was the wicked representative of the office which our Lord Himself held, and was at that time discharging. The true and eternal Priest of Israel and of mankind would not condescend to reply in detail to the malicious questions of the false priest of the day.

But it is of more consequence to us to observe the substance of our Lord's reply. The suggestion of Annas is that our Lord has been forming a body of disciples with some peculiar doctrine, inconsistent with the authorised teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees. Our Lord's answer, in brief, is: "My position has been an open and public one.

I have proclaimed the truth with which I am charged to the whole world, in the most public places, in synagogues and temples, whither all the Jews come together." It recalls His saying, "I am the Light of the World." "If," He seems to say to Annas, "you want to know what I teach, you are not to ascertain it by a private and midnight inquiry. It is the Light of Heaven which I have poured upon the world at large, and you must seek it there." There thus appears to be more in the answer than merely a definite refusal to submit to inquisition at the hands of Annas. It is a grand declaration, at the very outset of our Lord's trial, of the nature of His mission and His work. He had made up His mind, in the Garden of Gethsemane, to take the consequences of all He had said and done, at the hands of the wicked men who hated it; but those consequences would be the consequences of what He had already said and done in the face of the world. His mission is complete. As He said in His final prayer to His Father, "I have glorified Thee on the earth. I have accomplished the work Thou gavest Me to do." The mission was accomplished. Let it work itself out. Let the hatred which it had aroused in the hearts of wicked men come forth into the light of day and work its will. He could have checked or frustrated that hatred; but in order that He might complete His sacrifice, He

will not do so. He simply leaves His accomplished mission, His completed teaching, His perfect discharge of His Father's will, to meet the revolt of evil hearts and minds against it, and to bring on Himself the violence and murder which that revolt involved. He stands there, having completed His mission, and He leaves Annas to say how he would treat it. There had been, on His part, no private designs, no personal hostility to any one; but He had spoken His Father's words and done His Father's will, in the face of the whole people, and now it is for them to say how they will treat those words and that will. Even now, when His Own freedom and life are, so far as appears to human eyes, at stake, He will not force their consciences or acts. He could have done so at that moment. "Twelve legions of angels" stood at His command, but He leaves His life and His teaching to speak for themselves, and it is for men to say whether they will accept or reject them.

"And when He had said this, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest Thou the High Priest so?" The insult sufficiently bespeaks the sense of superiority apparent in the tone of our Lord's answer, which a mere officer of the guard could not understand: but the manner in which our Lord meets the gross affront is a summary

statement of the position we have been describing. "Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou Me?" By offering no resistance, and making no protest against the mere indignity, our Lord acts strictly on His own injunction, "If a man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also"; but at the same time, He appeals to the conscience of His insulter. His position towards him is the same as it is towards the High Priest. He stood by His words and took their consequences. If He had spoken evil, let witness be borne of the evil; but if He had spoken well, if His whole life and teaching had been a manifestation of love and truth and wisdom, why was He seized, and bound, and threatened, and insulted? It was for those to whom the question was addressed to answer it. Our Lord was content to put it, whether to the High Priest, or to the common servant who struck Him. Such then is the position assumed by our Lord at the outset of these awful scenes. He resolved in Gethsemane to allow men to do what they would with Him, and show by their words and their acts their appreciation of His words and His acts. He would leave them to show themselves in their true light, and would permit their inherent wickedness to work itself out to the full. But for Himself, His revelation is accomplished, His work is complete, and He

stands silently before the world as its patient witness.

Let us reflect, in conclusion, that He stands in the same position now. His words and His deeds are still before the world, before ourselves, as they were then, but He uses no force to compel us to believe them. He is silent, as His Father is silent. Having spoken once for all their whole will, and revealed to us perfect truth, the exercise of Divine judgment and Divine power is in reserve—held back by the mercy of God until the consummation of all things. Meanwhile, it is for us to say what we will do with that truth and that love. Will we accept it and submit to it, or will we, exhibiting in our own degree the conduct of His enemies at His trial, resist and reject Him? He has nothing more to say to us till that last hour of judgment. His will and His love have been declared openly to us, without reservation, in His Scriptures, by His Evangelists and His Apostles, and to each one of us He says, in substance, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of that evil, but if well, why disobeyest thou Me? Why persecutest thou Me? Why hatest thou Me, even if thou dost not and canst not smite Me?" It was not He Who was on His trial then: it was the High Priest who was on his trial and who condemned himself. We, too, are on our trial now. Let us pray that we may not similarly condemn ourselves.

VII

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

"Then said they all, Art Thou then the Son of God? And He said unto them, Ye say that I am.

"And they said, What need have we of further witness? for we ourselves have heard of His Own mouth." ST. LUKE xxii. 70, 71.

AFTER the interview with Annas, our Lord was led away, as St. Matthew tells us, to the High Priest Caiaphas, with whom were assembled all the Chief Priests and the Elders and the Scribes. It does not seem to have been a regular meeting of the Council, but a gathering of all its members to consider what charge could be substantiated against our Lord, and in what way He could be handed over to the Roman Government for execution. The Jews, as they afterwards acknowledged to Pilate, had at this time no power to inflict capital punishment themselves, and it was necessary, therefore, if our Lord was to be destroyed, that He should be brought under the judgment of the Roman authority. At the same time, the Jewish rulers were obliged to take care that they put themselves right with another power—that of the mass of the Jewish people. Only a few hours before, the people of Jerusalem were enthusiastic in our Lord's favour, and the priests had even

thought it impracticable to seize Him during the Feast. "The Chief Priests and the Scribes," we are told at the commencement of the fourteenth chapter of St. Mark, "sought how they might take Him by craft and put Him to death: but they said, Not on the Feast Day, lest there be an uproar of the people." They had, therefore, to combine two objects: to substantiate some charge against our Lord which would enable them to call for His punishment at the hands of Pilate, and also to bring some offence home to Him which would destroy His influence with the people at large. This consultation by night appears to have been intended to provide for these two purposes. The occasion was most critical, for unless, when day came, they could ensure our Lord being at once in the hands of Pilate, and condemned by the popular voice, their conspiracy might recoil on their own heads; there might be a popular rising in our Lord's favour, and something in the nature of a revolution, which would justify the Romans in depriving them of such power as remained to them.

These considerations explain the haste and passion of the proceedings, and at the same time bring into full light the solemn resolve of our Lord's words and actions. First of all, the Chief Priests and all the Council sought for witness against Jesus to put Him to death. St. Matthew

tells us that they sought for false witness, as they did also soon after in the case of Stephen, but they found none. "For many," says St. Mark, "bare witness against Him, but their witness agreed not together." It is a very striking fact that no evidence could be produced to substantiate any charge against our Lord of having violated Jewish law. It was a matter of course that no moral charge could be brought against Him; but, considering the manner in which He had been in constant antagonism to the Scribes and Pharisees on questions like the observance of the Sabbath, it seems very remarkable that no evidence could be found of His having broken the Law on such points. It is a forcible illustration of His saying that He came not to destroy the Law but to fulfil it. These Priests and Scribes resented with the utmost bitterness His interpretation of their Law, but they could not say, and no one could allege, that He had not scrupulously observed it.

At length, however, one allegation was made which seemed more promising than the rest. "There arose certain and bare false witness against Him, saying, We heard Him say, I will destroy this Temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." It was a misquotation of our Lord's mysterious saying recorded by St. John, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "He spake

it," says St. John, "of the Temple of His Body," and it seems a striking example of the overruling power of the Divine Spirit that it should be brought up against Him just as it was on the eve of its fulfilment, just as the Temple of His Body was about to be destroyed, and to be raised up again in three days. But, if referred, by those who were ready to misinterpret it, to the actual Temple at Jerusalem, it might easily be treated as a threat of some revolutionary proceedings against the building which was the most sacred possession of the Jews, and at the same time as a fanatical claim to some supernatural and almost Divine power. Probably there was nothing in the whole course of our Lord's ministry so calculated to rouse the deepest enmity on the part of the Priests, as the authority which He asserted over the Temple itself, and His indignant denunciation of them for their misuse of it. His later parables, moreover, had intimated that the destruction of the Temple and of the Jewish nation was to be expected, and it was therefore very natural that the false witness which the Priests were suborning against Him should at length concentrate itself on this question of our Lord's relation to the Temple. Although, therefore, the evidence of the witnesses did not agree together, the High Priest thought there was substance enough in the charge to enable him to call on our Lord for an answer. He stood up in the midst

and asked Jesus, saying, "Answerest Thou nothing? What is it that these witness against Thee? But He held His peace and answered nothing." He still acted on the principle which was exhibited in His reply to Annas; that His work and His teaching must speak for themselves; that He had finally discharged His mission upon earth; and that it was now the will of His Father that He should patiently endure the consequences of what He had said and done. If the false witnesses and the High Priests were determined to misrepresent His work and His words, it was of no avail for Him to repeat them or attempt to explain them, and, accordingly, He held His peace and answered nothing.

But the High Priest at once felt that this refusal to define or explain Himself involved an assertion of the very authority which seemed to be implied in His language about the Temple. The authority over the Temple was recognised as the special prerogative of the Messiah and of God Himself; and Caiaphas felt that in silently listening to these accusations, however ill-substantiated, He had acted with Messianic and Divine authority. Our Lord was tacitly asserting the very claims which aroused the indignation of the Priests and Elders. The High Priest, therefore, not unnaturally resolved suddenly to bring the matter to the point. "The High Priest

asked Him, and said unto Him, Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" But he did more than ask Him, he adjured Him by the most solemn charge which the High Priest could address to a Jew. "I adjure Thee," he said, "by the Living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Now this adjuration put our Lord in a different position from any mere questions like that of Annas respecting His teaching and His disciples. It challenged Him on the one central point of His position. It brought the whole of His mission to a head, and demanded from Him a plain statement of what its meaning was.

First of all, let us observe that there could be no doubt whatever about its precise meaning. He puts to our Lord two questions, united but distinct. The first is, Was He the Christ? The second, Was He the Son of God? The Jews generally had not realised that the Messiah would be the Son of God, and there would have been nothing contrary to Jewish law in the mere fact of an assertion by our Lord that He was the Christ. It was offensive to the Priests and Scribes that our Lord, Whom they hated, should claim to be the Christ, but no charge of blasphemy could be founded on it. John the Baptist had been asked at the outset of his ministry without offence, whether he was the Christ, and he quietly answered

that he was not, but that the Christ would come after him. The admission that He was the Christ might indeed be used, and was afterwards used before Pilate, as involving a claim on our Lord's part to be a King; but the people were willing to recognise Him as the Christ, and His assertion of His claim to be the Messiah could therefore be no offence to them. But the assertion that He was the Son of God, in the high and peculiar sense in which the words were intended, was a claim of a very different nature. Whenever our Lord had advanced it, or even intimated it, in His public discourses in Jerusalem, it had roused the Jews to such fury that they endeavoured to stone Him on the spot. It was, in fact, a tremendous claim—the most tremendous which a human being could put forward; and, therefore, our Lord did not attempt to put it forward at the outset of His ministry, but, so to say, led people up to it, educating the Jews gradually—and even His disciples gradually—to admit its possibility, to apprehend it, and, if possible, at length to accept it. Nothing, in fact, could have justified it but that marvellous ministry of power and goodness and wisdom, of physical and moral miracles, which was now brought to a close. It was not, in fact, until our Lord had shown by His words and deeds, through a ministry of three years, that He really possessed Divine power and Divine

qualities, that His claim could be fully put forward. It might be intimated, suggested, and, on favourable occasions, stated; but it could hardly have been grasped, much less generally believed, at the outset.

Now, however, it is quite clear from the question of the High Priest that our Lord was understood to make that claim. The mere fact that the High Priest should ask Him the question is the most conclusive proof that the effect of our Lord's ministry had been to impress the Jews and their rulers with the conviction that He claimed to be not only the Christ, but the Son of God. Accordingly, our Lord is practically asked to say at this final moment, whether He had been rightly understood. Is it, the High Priest seems to say, the real meaning of all you have said and done that you claim to be the Christ and the Son of God Himself? Is it this which is at the bottom of all your strange language and conduct respecting the Temple, for instance, of your claim to be Lord of the Temple as the very Son of the God to Whom the Temple belongs? These, it will be seen, are no captious or unjustifiable questions. The real conflict between our Lord and the Priests was one of authority. As Pilate afterwards said, they had delivered Him for envy, envy of the authority which He claimed. Across all the futile allegations of misrepresented and misreported words,

Caiaphas at length saw to the root of the matter. Does it, he exclaims, all mean this, that you claim to be both the Christ and the Son of God ?

To this solemn, cardinal, straightforward question our Lord does not hesitate for a moment to reply. Jesus replied, " Thou hast said " ; or, as St. Mark explains the Jewish idiom, " I am." It was the most momentous question ever addressed to one in human form, and the most momentous answer ever given upon this earth. It is a solemn assertion by our Lord, made upon oath, made in the presence of the High Priests, Elders, and Scribes of His nation, made in the prospect of His immediate condemnation and death, made therefore at the stake of His Own life, that He was, and is, not merely, the Messiah for Whom the whole Jewish nation had been looking, not merely the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King of His people, not merely the representative of God, Who claimed in that capacity and homage and obedience of the Jews, but " the Son of the Blessed One," the Son of God Himself, endued with all Divine power. Lest there should be any doubt about the practical effect of His claim, He goes further. The exclamation of Caiaphas illustrates the startling effect which this declaration had upon the assembly ; but our Lord, instead of softening it, goes on to warn them of the tremendous meaning it involved. " Nevertheless," He adds, " Hereafter shall ye see

the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of Heaven." Two passages of their Scriptures were recalled to their minds by these words: The 110th Psalm, which He had previously in their hearing applied to the Messiah, where God addresses Him, "Sit Thou on My right hand until I make Thy foes Thy footstool"; and the passage of Daniel in which it is described how "one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of Heaven, and He came to the Ancient of Days and they brought Him near before Him, and there was given Him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." To these awful, Divine and Eternal attributes our Lord, in these words, solemnly and on oath makes claim, and thus gathers up into one supreme assertion of His office and His nature, the whole of His self-revelation. But He could not do any more than assert it. Argument was impossible. The moral nature of the Priests and Scribes and of the Council was hardened against the admission of any such claim. They had adjourned, and met again in the early morning, and put to Him this final question, and received this final answer, with the further statement that it was of no avail for Him to say more. "If I tell you," He said,

" ye will not believe, and if I also ask you ye will not answer Me, nor let Me go. Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God." Then said they all, " Art Thou then the Son of God? and He said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need have we of further witness? for we ourselves have heard of His Own Mouth."

Let us never fail to bear in mind that that solemn answer of our Lord stands to this day in the face of the world, as much as it stood at that moment in the face of the Chief Priests and Elders and Scribes of the Jewish people. In the pages of the Gospels our Lord appears before the whole world to whom His message comes, and declares on oath, in the name of God, and in the face of immediate death, that He is not only the Christ of the Jews, but the Son of God Himself. Whoever doubts the Christian faith, whoever fails to render homage to Him for life and for death, has to face that solemn oath. It is a grave thing to say, so grave that it is seldom realised, but it is none the less the sober truth, that to reject the claims of our Lord to be the Divine Judge and Lord of all mankind, to be the Son of God Himself, sitting at God's right hand, involves a direct contradiction of our Lord's solemn oath spoken on this awful occasion. But let us not, in this connection, think only of those who absolutely reject Him. Let us think of

ourselves who render Him so imperfect, so half-hearted an allegiance. If His sacred Figure were more clearly and more constantly present to our minds, standing there in that assembly with the rulers of His people, in sight of the Cross, revealing Himself to us as our Lord and our God, and soon after sealing the testimony with His Blood, should we not tremble, or weep like Peter, at the recollection of our faithlessness towards Him, and render Him for the future a more whole-hearted, a more earnest, a more profound allegiance? Such, at least, is the great purpose with which we are called upon to meditate on these scenes this week, and let us pray that God may deepen their effect upon our souls.

VIII

HE HELD HIS PEACE

"And some began to spit upon Him, and to cover His face, and to buffet Him, and to say unto Him, Prophesy. And the servants did strike Him with the palms of their hands."—St. Mark xiv. 65.

We have considered our Lord's appearance before Annas and Caiaphas, His answer to their questions, and the supreme calm and deliberate declaration which He made, as the result of all, that He was at once the Messiah and the very Son of God. We saw how that claim was treated by the High Priests and the Council, how they denounced it at once as blasphemy, and determined on the strength of it to denounce our Lord to the Roman Governor "as perverting the nation" and "saying that He Himself is Christ a King." So far their conduct is at least intelligible. There was, indeed, an intense meanness in appealing to the foreign Government, which they hated, in order to destroy our Lord; but with respect to the other charge against Him, there was but one alternative. If He claimed to be the Son of God and was not, His claim was certainly blasphemous in the highest degree. If of that character, it

certainly required from the spiritual authorities of the nation the gravest denunciation. Their rejection of Him in this final crisis was the culmination of a long course of hardening of their hearts against the appeals He had addressed to them in word and deed. Their sin at this moment was the result of all that had gone before. They had closed their ears, their eyes, and their hearts to Him during the three years of His ministry. They had condemned Him before they seized Him, and they were now simply expressing the judgment they had formed beforehand. As our Lord said, all argument or appeal now was useless, "If I tell you ye will not believe, and if I also ask you, ye will not answer Me, nor let Me go." In the mere fact, therefore, that the Jewish authorities denounced our Lord's claim as blasphemous there is nothing surprising, after all that had gone before. The two claims, His and theirs, to be the representatives, and the expression of the will, of God, had come at last to their final issue, but that issue had been determined beforehand, and its decision was now inevitable.

But that which is appalling and hateful in the scene which follows is the gross and brutal insults to which our Lord is immediately subjected. When He made His final answer to Annas, "Why askest thou Me? Ask them which heard Me," "one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the

palm of his hand, saying, Answerest Thou the High Priest so? Jesus answered, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?" The animosity against our Lord in the circle of the High Priest must have been bitter in the extreme for one of the officers to violate the decencies of any Court of Justice by such an outrage. We are not told, moreover, that this insult was either rebuked or checked, and our Lord is thus abandoned by His judge to the insolence of his subordinates. No wonder that insults of a grosser character were allowed in the Court of Caiaphas. "Then did they spit in His Face, and buffeted Him; and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?" The subordinate officers of the Court could not have proceeded to these outrages unless they had been sure of their being condoned by their superiors. Again, not a word of rebuke seems to be uttered by the authority, and our Lord has no protection against these intolerable insults. They are worse than the subsequent insults of the Roman soldiers, for the soldiers were simply indulging in the rude habits of their class to a condemned member of a race whom they despised; but that Jews should thus insult a Jew in their own Court of Justice; that Jewish rulers and judges should be witnesses

of it, and not do anything to prevent it, seems an exhibition of almost inconceivable passion and hatred. It was sin enough for them to treat our Lord's solemn revelation of Himself as blasphemous; but He had at least spoken with gravity and dignity, and decency required that they should be content with a similarly solemn rejection of His claims. It is imperative we should recognise the abominable character of this treatment of our Lord, and the responsibility of the Jewish authorities for it, if we are to appreciate the full revelation which is conveyed to us by these scenes. Here was a man standing before the authorities and the officers of the highest Jewish Court—their highest spiritual Court—against Whom it had been found impossible to collect any evidence that was worthy of credit. So far as His conduct and His teaching were concerned the result of their investigation that evening had been to anticipate the subsequent verdict of Pilate, "I find in Him no fault at all." There is no doubt that His ministry had been of the gracious, merciful, and benevolent character in which it is depicted by the Evangelists: He stood before them in the utmost meekness and inoffensiveness, yet it is difficult to recall any instance of a prisoner being so vilely treated by those who had the charge of him.

Whatever else may be said of it, it must at least be recognised that this is a terrible revelation

of the evil possibilities of human nature, the most terrible and glaring revelation, in fact, that has ever been exhibited. Those who have had the greatest insight into human nature have indeed always recognised the intensity of the hatred of evil against good. One of our own poets speaks of "the strong antipathy of good to bad," and there is at least an equal antipathy of bad to good. One of the most extraordinary passages in all literature is that which has been already mentioned, in which Plato predicted that if a perfectly just man appeared, he would be hated, insulted, and finally put to a cruel death: but it would hardly have been believed possible unless it had been seen in actual reality. But that is what we have before us in this scene. We behold not merely the rejection, but the insult, the outrage, the spurning of perfect Goodness, Truth, Meekness, and Innocence. This, be it observed, is historical fact. This is what human nature has been proved capable of, and capable, moreover, in a race of the highest capacities, which had enjoyed the highest advantages of moral and spiritual training. The Jews were the Chosen People, and this is what human nature came to even in the chosen race of mankind. Is not this a dreadful warning, in view of all that is sometimes said about trusting human nature. This is what human nature has been capable of. We may hope it is impossible now: it is probably impossible

in nations and countries where the influence of the Gospel and of the Saviour's example is prevalent; but if that influence is removed, and so far as that influence is removed—removed from our public life, removed from public thought, removed from education—so far we must recognise that human nature is capable—if capable once, capable always—of such a hideous and degrading exhibition of hatred to all goodness and truth and gentleness, as we have before us in this scene.

But let us pass now to realise what it was that rendered such an exhibition possible. If it was provoked by our Lord's perfect truth and goodness in antagonism to the passions of human nature, it was rendered possible by His deliberate and unwavering resolve not to resist or even to check it. We cannot realise distinctly enough that the endurance of all this insult and outrage was absolutely voluntary. In the scene of His arrest in the Garden, our Lord had clearly shown the truth of His declaration that no man could take His life from Him without His consent, that He had power to lay it down and power to take it up again. A word and a look from Him were enough to paralyse the action of those who came to seize Him. What He did in the Garden, He might have done in the Court, and the men that mocked Him and smote Him and struck Him in the face might have been silenced or struck

dead in a moment had He so pleased. Why was it not His pleasure thus to assert and deliver Himself? It would be deep presumption to attempt to suggest all His reasons, but one result of His action may be regarded as one of His chief motives. Had He not been thus patient and submissive, had He not allowed the Jews and their officers to indulge their malignity without opposition or control, this revelation of the evil realities and capacities of our nature would never have been made; the Greek philosopher's marvellous anticipation would have remained a mere dream. Human nature would not have known what the real possibilities of its evil are, and what therefore is the extent of its corruption. In order to save us from our sins, it was imperative that we should be made to realise what those sins are, what is the evil with which we have to contend, what is the deadliness of the corruption we have to meet. It is this which is forced upon our souls by these scenes in the Court of Annas and Caiaphas, even more perhaps than by the violent cruelty which followed. That perfect Goodness should be murdered and cast from mankind is one thing: that It should be violently spurned, spit upon, buffeted, and smitten by men who had lived all their lives under the influence of the revelation of God to His Chosen People, that is a thing to appal and terrify and disgust us as to the capacities of evil

within us. All this our Lord brought out by His marvellous resolve to offer no resistance whatever to the wrongs and violences which might be inflicted upon Him, but to endure them all in silence. During His ministry He had been struggling with evil in every form, physical, moral, and spiritual. He had personally fought with every such form; He had cast out devils from men's bodies and souls; He had opposed and denounced the Scribes and Pharisees in language of the utmost vehemence and indignation: but now He resolved to let evil work its will upon Himself, and by that resolve He revealed to all time its real character.

Can it be doubted that this wonderful and adorable patience of our Lord is a momentous element in the work of our redemption, and in rendering possible our salvation from the ruin which our sin involved. If this is the possibility of human nature: if this is what it naturally comes to when left to itself, can we avoid the conclusion that the whole human race must have come to some awful ruin and disaster had there not been some Divine interposition. In point of fact, the vices exhibited in the persecution and murder and trial of our Lord both by the Jews and by the Romans, were reducing society throughout the world at that day to a position of profound corruption. That corruption was stayed by the Gospel of Christ and by the action of His Church; but it may well be that

one thing was indispensable, not less than other things, to that deliverance, and that was that human nature should know where it was going, that there should be exhibited before its eyes, in ghastly and unmistakable evidence, the real nature, the horror and the shame, of the evil with which it was infected, and should thus be impelled to revolt from it. The saying that "Vice is a monster of such hideous mien as to be hated needs but to be seen" indicates an essential element in the method of the Divine Government. The ordinary method by which God reveals His laws to us, and obliges us to realise the consequences of disobeying them, is to maintain their inflexible operation and allow us to suffer the penalty of their violation. That is the way, for instance, in which His sanitary laws, the conditions for our physical health and happiness, have been revealed to us and forced upon our minds. He has allowed men to suffer in terrible diseases and plagues the consequences of their neglect of His physical laws, and they have thus been compelled to investigate them and to obey them. That is to a large extent also the way in which His moral laws are revealed and forced upon our minds. We may see in history the deadly result of immorality of all kinds on the welfare and the very existence of nations. But if the moral evil of human nature had been allowed to work itself out to the full,

the consequences might have been more awful than we dare contemplate. It might well have resulted in nothing less than a hell upon earth. But when our Saviour, in infinite meekness and humility, allowed those consequences to be worked out upon Himself, He did set on foot, as a matter of fact, that very revulsion from evil which it is the object of all God's government to produce. St. Peter, when he went out and wept bitterly, was the first example of the effect of these terrible scenes upon mankind in general. Ever since that time men have felt the Eyes of Jesus upon them as they were turned upon him, and a sense of guilt and shame has been aroused in them, and they too have wept often, bitterly.

In this sense, at least, among others, He bore our sins; in that patience and humble endurance He showed us the evil of which we are capable, the evil of which we are all more or less guilty. The consequences of our sins are displayed to heaven and earth in the outrages, the insults, and the cruelties of which His perfect nature, in soul and body, was the victim, and we acknowledge our failings and beg for His pardon, His mercy, and His salvation. He probed our wounds by suffering those wounds Himself, and with His stripes we are healed. It is not an artificial, it is a real substitution. There He stands, enduring what by all the laws of human nature we were

liable to endure if He had not voluntarily submitted Himself to it. The dread nature of the Divine law of the consequences of sin is manifested once for all, and its vindication in the misery of mankind is replaced by its vindication in the misery of the holy Lord Jesus. Let us pray that such contemplations may have upon ourselves the effect which this scene itself had upon St. Peter. Some of us may live to weep bitterly, let us all weep humbly and gratefully.

IX

THE KING OF TRUTH

"Pilate therefore said unto Him, Art Thou a King then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice."—St. John xviii. 37.

The result of the consultations of the Chief Priests, Elders, and Scribes during the night of Thursday and the early morning of Good Friday, was to establish two allegations respecting our Lord, upon His Own admission. First, that He claimed to be the Christ. Secondly, that He claimed to be the Son of God. They were unable, however, on these two admissions to put Him to death themselves, at all events in the manner they desired; and they therefore brought Him to Pilate, the Roman Governor, calling upon him to put our Lord to death by crucifixion as an offender against the Roman authority. They would be satisfied with nothing less. Pilate offered to allow them to punish our Lord themselves for the offence which they considered had been established against Him. "Take ye Him," he said unto them, "and judge Him according to your law." But they replied,

"It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." Pilate then understood that they expected him to punish our Lord with death, and proceeded to consider their charges. Now, of the charges they had established, the second, that our Lord claimed to be the Son of God, would not have been of any avail for their purpose before the Roman Governor. It enabled them to denounce our Lord as a blasphemer, but as a pure question of religion it was not a matter for punishment by the Roman authority: but the other, that He was the Christ, could be represented as a political offence, and it was this therefore that they put forward. "They began to accuse Him," says St. Luke, "saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King." Considering that there was nothing the Jewish rulers resented more than that they were under the dominion of another potentate, the Cæsar, and nothing they desired more than a Messiah who should appear as a King and deliver them from that dominion, there is a peculiar baseness in their bringing this charge against our Lord.

But what we have to consider is the manner in which our Lord met the charge when questioned respecting it by Pilate. Pilate went into the Palace and called Jesus and questioned Him privately, and the account of this interview,

which is preserved in the Gospel of the beloved disciple alone, must, it would seem, have been communicated to St. John by our Lord Himself after His resurrection. Pilate said unto Him, "Art Thou the King of the Jews?" Our Lord does not at first reply directly, but asks Pilate in return, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?" The purpose of the question seems to be to press upon Pilate's conscience to consider whether there was any real evidence that our Lord had acted the part of a political pretender. If He had claimed to be a King in the sense in which the High Priests put forward the charge, Pilate, as the Roman Governor, could hardly have failed to have heard of it. It was his express business to keep order and to see that no attempts to set up royal authority were tolerated within his province. The effect of our Lord's question, therefore, is to vindicate Himself as far as His relation to the Roman authority was concerned, and Pilate, though with some impatience at being thus questioned in return, admits as much. "Am I a Jew?" he said, "Thine own nation and the Chief Priests have delivered Thee unto me. What hast Thou done?"

Thus fairly and directly charged, our Lord gives a not less direct answer than He had given to Caiaphas, and acknowledges to Pilate that He claims to be a King: but lest Pilate should

misunderstand Him, He prefaces His acknowledgment with an explanation of the nature and character of His Kingdom. "My Kingdom," He said, "is not of this world: if My Kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My Kingdom not from hence." This, it will be observed, is a negative description of His Kingdom—an account of what it is not. It is not of this world. He does not say it is not in this world, but it does not proceed from it or arise out of it. The kingdom of which Pilate was the representative, and which it was his duty to protect, arose entirely out of this world, from the men of this world and the interests of this world. It arose from their struggles against each other for wealth and power amidst the circumstances of the world in which they lived. Its rulers had indeed duties which were of high moral importance. They were ordained by God, as St. Paul said, to reward the good and punish the evil, and were in this sense the ministers of God; but the origin of the Roman dominion, its constitution, and the chain of causes out of which it had grown, were all of this world. It was for this reason that it had no permanence, and was in perpetual apprehension of new kings arising in its midst, and of disturbance and overthrow by them. But My Kingdom, says our Lord, does not arise out of this world, and therefore is not to be

supported by the means and powers of this world. "If My Kingdom were of this world, then would My servants have fought that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence." He thus assures Pilate that he need apprehend no force from Him or His servants, and no attempt to set up a kingdom out of the resources of this world.

Pilate accepts the assurance, and it seems remarkable that to his mind, unwarped by the bitter prejudice of the High Priests and Scribes, every word uttered by our Lord seems to go home with the stamp of truth and conviction. He may not understand what our Lord says, but he does not doubt it; so, in answer to this saying of our Lord, he only puts the further inquiry, "But you are a King then?" and then our Lord plainly confesses that He is, and gives not merely a negative but a positive description of His Kingdom. "Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice."

It will be seen that, by this series of questions and answers, our Lord had at length placed before Pilate, without ambiguity or disguise, a simple and plain statement of the meaning of the charge brought against Him by the Chief Priests, that He

claimed to be Christ a King. In doing so, He serves two great purposes: He does justice to Himself, and He does justice to Pilate. He makes it evident to the Governor that there is no foundation for the charge that He was creating a political disturbance, and at the same time He opens to Pilate a vision of the true nature of His mission and His Person, which afforded him an opportunity for grasping the blessings our Lord had come into the world to bestow. By the same revelation He clears Himself, and He offers the Roman the means of saving his very soul. There seems something peculiarly gracious in the manner in which the Saviour thus disembarrasses the situation, as it were, of all irrelevance, and brings Pilate face to face with the very Gospel itself. As He had said to His disciples, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me," so here He says to Pilate, "I am the King of Truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My Voice." If so, the way was at that moment open to Pilate to accept the truth at the hands of its King, and to become a true man. But before we consider how Pilate met this gracious offer, let us look a little more closely into this account by our Lord of His Kingdom and His Office.

Our Lord, then, declares Himself the King of a realm which, though in this world, is not of this world. From whence is it then, and in what does

it consist? Our Lord replies that it is the realm, the kingdom, of truth. Above this world, therefore, in which we outwardly live, and independent of it, there is another world, which is the world of truth. Our souls and spirits live in this world of truth, just as our bodies live in the physical world; and the world of truth is of far more importance to us than the other. There are great eternal and Divine realities amidst which, in our spiritual nature, we move—realities which, because of their eternal and Divine character, are true in a higher and more permanent sense than any of the things which we call true in this world. The supreme reality is God Himself in His threefold nature as Father, Son, and Spirit—our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, and no man knows the truth who does not know Him in those three Persons or Characters, and live in union and harmony with Him. "This," said our Saviour, in the prayer in which He summed up His life's work, "this is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent." From the knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ Whom He has sent, flow all other truths. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and life. From Him and from our likeness to Him, comes our moral nature, those qualities of truth, and faith, and love, and grace which we recognise as Divine. We are too apt

to regard many of these things as matters of opinion, or of human feeling and judgment, but our Lord here declares that they belong to a great realm of reality and truth, more substantial, more permanent, more real than the external world in which we seem to live and move and have our being.

The world in which we really live and move and have our being is this Divine and Spiritual world, and we are just as much subject to its laws as to the laws of the physical world. The science of this world reveals to us a vast system of physical laws to which we must accommodate ourselves at the peril of suffering or destruction; and our Saviour in the same way reveals to us a vast and eternal system of moral and religious laws to which, similarly, we must accommodate ourselves at the peril of moral suffering and moral death. The Sermon on the Mount, for instance, reveals the laws of the Kingdom of Heaven. Those laws are uttered with authority by its King; and so our Lord declares solemnly at the conclusion of it that "Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man who built his house upon the sand," and "whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and doeth them shall be likened unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock." Our Lord here speaks as the King of the Kingdom of Heaven,

revealing its laws—the laws of eternal truth—and solemnly declaring that He will enforce them. This is the meaning of His being the King of Truth. The King of the country utters the laws of the country, and enforces those laws upon his subjects. Our Lord, therefore, as King, is more than a prophet. He does not merely declare the truth, but enforces it. By Him we shall be judged. He will determine hereafter whether, and how far, we have obeyed the laws of truth, and will bless or punish us accordingly.

But it is a King's office also to protect his subjects from their enemies, and to ensure them the blessings of his kingdom; and our Lord is the King in this sense also—that He, and He alone, is able to protect us from the falsehood which is the great enemy of our souls, and to give us power to submit to His truth and obey His laws. Now this is something of the comprehensive meaning of our Lord's declaration that He is the King of the Kingdom of Truth. "To this end was I born," He says, "and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." At His first coming it was to this part of His office as a King that He confined Himself. He did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He came to bear witness to the truth in word and deed, so as to win men's allegiance by the most gracious of all influences, and He died at last in

attestation of the truth; sealing His testimony with His Own blood. His other office as a King of Truth is in reserve, and He will not be fully revealed in this awful capacity until the last day: but in that capacity too He will be revealed, and it will then be realised, in scenes of awe and dread, that He is a King, not merely in declaring the laws of truth, but in enforcing them by terrible judgments.

It will thus be seen that to Pilate, as to a Gentile, our Lord is graciously revealing that which is the meaning of the true charge that He is Christ the King, in terms which are independent of the particular conception and ordinances of the Jews. The word "Christ" had to them a technical meaning, but if we would know what is the permanent and eternal meaning of the word and the office, in relation to all mankind, and not merely to the Jews, our Lord here declares it. It is that He is a King, the eternal King, Whose office it is to reveal and impart and to enforce all truth, all in its proper time and occasion. By insisting on this fact, He warns us against the danger to which we are all more or less exposed, and which is the great temptation of the world in relation to the Christian religion, to think that its doctrines and its precepts are mere matters of religious opinion, of more or less variable belief. Our Lord says they are the truth, the eternal truth,

and He is the Divine King Who will enforce them.

This was the difficulty which was immediately exhibited in the case of Pilate. "Pilate saith unto Him, What is truth?" The meaning of the question is no doubt too truly expressed in the memorable observation with which Lord Bacon opens his Essay: "'What is truth?' said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer." The heathen world of his day was weary with searching after truth, and many men like Pilate had come to the conclusion that it was not to be found, that nothing could really be known; and with this had inevitably followed, that no supposed truth and no conviction, and at length no duty, was worth fighting for or making a sacrifice for. It was this light view of truth, this belief that there was not reality or substance in it, which was the cause of the moral weakness which Pilate soon showed. If men do not believe in truth, they will not believe in right, and their actions and their conduct become as unsteady and untrustworthy as their opinions. If we were left to ourselves, there would be good reason for the doubt which Pilate expressed: but the blessing of our Lord's revelation is that we are not left to ourselves, but that He—the Lord of Truth, the King of the Kingdom of Heaven—has not only come into the world to bear witness to the truth, but is with us now to

convince us of truth—"of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment"—and by His Spirit to lead us into all truth. He gave Pilate, moreover, one final guidance, which is equally a guidance to ourselves. "Every one that is of the truth," He says, "heareth My voice." "To him that hath shall be given." If we are of the truth—the truth so far as we know—we shall recognise the truth when we hear it. We shall hear the Saviour's Voice, and follow Him. For, after all, men do not really doubt if there is truth in the world, if they try to live up to it so far as it has touched them. "There is a light that lighteth every one that cometh into the world," and if Pilate had been true to his conscience in the past, he would not now have asked that desperate, if not careless, question, "What is truth?" To all of us, if we seek for truth in all things, truth above all in our inward parts, our Saviour will reveal His truth more and more—the knowledge of Himself, the knowledge of His Father which is eternal Life, and will bring us more and more into His eternal light and love.

X

ECCE HOMO

"Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above: therefore he that deliver Me unto thee hath the greater sin."—St. John xix. 11.

The result of our Lord's revelation of Himself to Pilate in the words already considered, as the King of Truth, was to induce Pilate to be sufficiently true to his conscience to go out again from the Palace to the Jews to say to them, "I find no fault in Him at all." But he cannot bring himself to be true enough to act on this conviction and to release our Lord at once. He endeavours to escape the necessity by two devices. First of all, he took advantage of our Lord's being a Galilean to send Him to Herod in the hope that Herod might relieve him of his difficulty. The expedient failed, and then he endeavoured to get the Jews themselves to relieve him of his responsibility, by suggesting that as they had a right to the release of one person at the Feast, they should ask for the release of the King of the Jews. But when they all cried out "Not this Man, but Barabbas," Pilate was weak and unjust

enough to proceed to the first stage in the punishment of a criminal by ordering our Lord to be scourged. But his conscience and his sense of truth still struggles with him, and after the terrible cruelty of the scourging and the mockery and abuse of our Lord by the soldiers, Pilate makes one more attempt to soften the bitter determination of the Jews. He brings our Lord forth wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, presenting that infinitely pathetic spectacle which, beyond anything except the Crucifixion, has fixed upon itself the eyes and the thoughts of mankind, and he points to Him with those words too full of meaning to be interpreted, *Ecce Homo*, "Behold the Man." But the spectacle produces no softening effect upon the Chief Priests and their followers, and they cry out again, "Crucify, Crucify." Pilate then says once more, with a combined taunt and avowal, "Take ye Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." This rouses the Jews to utter the other charge which, for political reasons, they had hitherto kept in the background, but which was, as we saw, the real reason for which they condemned our Lord. "We have a law," they said, "and by this law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

But this produces precisely the opposite effect on Pilate from that which they desired. It was not a ground on which Pilate could condemn our

Lord, but it increased the awe with which our Lord's words and demeanour had already impressed him. It is not to be supposed that the word "God" meant to Pilate all that it meant to the Jews; but it meant, at all events, a supernatural Being, and this Pilate evidently realised our Lord might very well be. He took our Lord, therefore, back into the Judgment Hall and said to Him, "Whence art Thou?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Many reasons have been assigned for our Lord's silence; but as we are not told the reason, as we are in the case of His refusal to answer Annas, it is perhaps rash and scarcely reverential to attempt to penetrate it. All we seem justified in observing is, that our Lord had previously told Pilate that He was not of this world, but came into it as a King to bear witness to the truth; and as, in spite of this and of his conviction of His innocence, Pilate had done Him the monstrous injustice of scourging Him, he had certainly no right to another word from Him. But this consideration at least adds infinitely to the grace of what follows. Pilate then speaks to our Lord in a tone which we may charitably interpret as one of surprise rather than of anger. "Speakest Thou not unto me? knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?" And then our Lord speaks. "Thou couldest," He said, "have no power at all against Me except

it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." These were our Lord's last words to Pilate—His last words before being finally condemned to be crucified.

Now observe, in the first place, their supreme graciousness. With whom are they concerned? Not with our Lord Himself, but with Pilate. When given by Pilate another opportunity of saying something on His Own behalf, some evidence of His origin, something to induce the Governor to interpose again on His behalf, our Lord is silent. He does not condescend to say another word for Himself, but He does seize the opportunity of saying a word of warning and of comfort to Pilate, to the Governor who was sacrificing Him to the passions of the Jews, and inflicting on Him the most cruel torments. "We know," says St. Paul, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." If we would know that grace, nothing can reveal it more than this word of the Saviour to Pilate. Suffering from the scourging, mocked and insulted, He has no word to say for Himself, but He has a message of truth and gentleness to the man who was so cruelly wronging Him. It is an anticipation of that speech on the Cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Pilate did not know his own position at that moment, and he would come to know it, and

realise it bitterly afterwards; and both for his ignorance in the present, and his remorse in the future, the Saviour has a message of mercy. For Himself, He knew that all was over. He had finally delivered His message both to the Jews and to the Roman Governor, but He was possessed with profound pity for the man who was apparently His judge, and He seizes the opportunity to speak in tones of solemn admonition and mercy to him.

He tells Pilate, in the first place, that he is mistaken in supposing that he of himself has the power and authority he claims. "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me," our Lord says, "except it were given thee from above." There is no doubt that the words "from above" mean from Heaven. Our Lord reminds Pilate that he holds an office which has been entrusted to him by the Divine will, in the course of God's providential government of the world, and that it is solely by virtue of that Divine order and dispensation that he is in a position to pronounce judgment upon Him. Now, apart from its immediate reference to Pilate, it is a momentous revelation which our Lord thus makes at the very crisis of His agony, that it was by the Divine will and order that He was brought to death in the particular way, and by the particular human agency, which were employed. It was, in the first place, deeply laid in the Divine counsels before the foundations

of the world, that our Lord should be put to death at the hands of wicked men, and so become a sacrifice for human sin. Without pretending to penetrate into the details of that mystery, we may venture to say that sin could never have been fully understood, its full evil never revealed, and consequently no adequate reparation made for it, unless a perfectly just and holy Being had exposed Himself to the full development of that evil, and thus exhibited by its revolt against Himself, and its utter rejection of Him, its inherent abomination.

There are few facts more fitted to impress our thoughts on this subject than that it was clearly foreseen and stated by the great philosopher of Greece, that if a perfect man ever appeared in the world he would be cast out of it with ignominy and torment, and shamefully put to death. "An apparently just man," says Plato, in his *Republic*, "would live amid the applause of men, and die with honour; but a really just man would, to men's perverted minds, appear unjust, and would be hated by them and cast out." It was a marvellous piece of prophetic insight, but would men in general have believed that their nature was so corrupt if that prophetic vision had not been actually realised? It was to realise it, to reveal human sin and injustice in its true colours, to stamp it with infinite shame to all eternity,

and at the same time, through the acceptance of its consequences by One Who could bear them, to provide an expiation which should be sufficient for all time, that God the Father consented that His Son "should take upon Him our flesh and suffer death upon the Cross." This awful tragedy, the conflict of the perfectly just with the unjust, the patient endurance of the suffering and death thus inflicted upon the just by the unjust, the intercession of the Sufferer for those who knew not what they did, and the possibility thus created that God should, so to say, hold His Hand in the further punishment of sin, and be at once just and forgiving—all these things could not have come to pass had it not been "given from above," had not a Divine will, a Divine truth, a Divine obedience, a Divine love, resolved to bring the evil of the world to this issue. All was in this respect Divinely ordained. The death and Passion of our Lord were no accident, no incidental development of particular circumstances in human history. They were brought about by the Divine determination to provide at once a full manifestation of human evil, and a full manifestation of Divine goodness and love. For this purpose, our Lord, deliberately, as we have seen, and with full foresight of the consequences, came forward to bring the whole force of human evil to bear upon His Own Head, in order that

there might be no need of its breaking in storm and tempest upon the heads of those whom He loved.

But for this purpose, as our Lord's words further indicate, there was something supremely fitting in the manner in which His death was brought about. In the agents by whom it was compassed, it reveals, in the first place, the various sides of human evil. In the Jews, as exemplified in Caiaphas, we see the natural revolt of the human heart against the revelation of perfect goodness and moral truth. That was what our Lord had revealed to the Jews during His ministry; that is what is recorded in the Gospels, in the account of His words and deeds; and against that perfect revelation of truth it was, that the hearts of the chosen people and of their teachers and guides revolted. Light came into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. There is no other account than that to be given of what occurred in the case of the Jews. Pilate, in his turn, was a representative of the characters which the world tended to produce without the light of revelation—characters who asked the question, "What is truth?" and who doubted whether there is anything eternally true or right, and whether any interests but those of this world are worth considering. Herod is the type of the worst

form of worldliness, of the vice which hardens the heart, and destroys the sensibilities of truth and goodness, and can only make a mock at them. But the Jew and the Gentile, the man with law and the man without law, were brought together in this great trial, and both alike showed their corruption. The one their hatred of the highest truth, and the other their inability to make any sacrifice for it.

But besides this, a solemn saying of our Lord, to which St. John makes special reference, in the course of these transactions, points out that there was a peculiar and terrible fitness for this purpose in the manner of our Lord's death, a manner of death which could only be inflicted on Him, in the Divine dispensation, in consequence of His having been handed over to the Roman Governor. Jesus had said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." Can any one doubt that that awful exposure of our Lord in the face of the world which was involved in His crucifixion, has stamped His sacred and suffering figure on the hearts and minds of men in a degree in which no other form of death would have operated? It was an eternal Crucifix which was erected there on Calvary, to which the finger of the Roman Governor points with an everlasting *Ecce Homo*. It was, our Lord says, by the Divine order and will that this awful picture of human sin was

thus erected between Heaven and earth. If Pilate was given power over Him to condemn Him to that death, the power was given from above, for the better carrying into effect of the awful but gracious purposes of God.

But with respect to Pilate, our Lord then adds the gracious words, "Therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." "Therefore," in other words, "because I am delivered up to you in accordance with the providential dispensation of God's government, it follows that you are not entirely an independent agent in the matter. The responsibility of judging Me is forced upon you. If you exercise that responsibility falsely, you will commit sin and must suffer for it, but your sin is not so great as that of the men who, without being compelled to act against Me, took it on themselves to do so, and delivered Me up to thee." Caiaphas deliberately, of his own motion, set on foot the persecution, the arrest, the putting to death of our Lord. Our Lord was not brought before him, but he was the originator of the plot which proceeded from his own impulse and hatred; but Pilate, without his will, and even against his will, was forced to take a part in this tremendous tragedy, and to decide for or against our Lord. With what infinite grace and justice then does not our Lord, in this moment of His own agony, take account of the fact that Pilate, without any

act of his own, had been brought under this severe temptation, and assures him that it would be remembered as a mitigating circumstance. Just as with Caiaphas, our Lord had assumed the character of the Son of God, and, as it were, put the High Priest on his trial, so here He tacitly answers Pilate's inquiry, "Whence art Thou?" by speaking to him as his Judge and extending mercy to him. We may well hope that the day came when those words of profound justice and pity brought a ray of hope to Pilate's soul; but, at all events, as our Lord's last words in the trial, they are a final exhibition of His Divine character as a just God and a Saviour.

Thus, in these various utterances throughout His trial, has our Lord summed up the whole of His work, His office, and His grace. Before Annas, He recalled the whole of His ministry of power and wisdom and goodness. Before the High Priest He proclaimed His highest Name—the Christ and the Son of God. Before Pilate, He revealed Himself as the Lord of Truth, and He finally reveals Himself as the Lamb of God, brought by the Father's will and His own, to bear the sins of the whole world, and thinking only, in the hour of death, of extending mercy to those who have wronged Him, as to those who knew not what they did. How can we better conclude than in words like those of St. John at the close

of His Gospel, "There are many other things," truly, which Jesus said and did in His last hours; "but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name."

XI

BEFORE HEROD

"And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him.

"Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing.

"And the Chief Priests and Scribes stood and vehemently accused Him.

"And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate.

"And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves."

ST. LUKE xxiii. 8–12.

As we have seen, Pilate was convinced that the political charges at all events brought against our Lord were baseless, and it was with those only that he was concerned. The charge that He made Himself the Son of God was not, in the first place, urged by our Lord's accusers, and when it was urged at a later stage in our Lord's trial, though it had a deep effect on Pilate's mind, he did not base any action upon it. It was a religious charge, with which the Jews alone were concerned, but the charge that He claimed to be a King, in that political sense which concerned Pilate, had been completely answered by our Lord's solemn

explanation to Pilate that He was indeed a King, but a King of truth—the King of a spiritual and moral realm which was not of this world. Pilate did not understand what this realm could mean, and passed the matter off with the light question, "What is truth?" But our Lord's words had penetrated sufficiently into his mind to convince him that our Lord was not pretending to any earthly power; and he went out to the Jews who were waiting outside the Judgment Hall and said unto them, "I find in Him no fault at all." Their object in bringing our Lord before Pilate seemed thus to be defeated, and we are told that they were the more fierce, renewing their accusations against Him, while He answered nothing.

But in the course of those accusations they used one expression which led to an unexpected and very remarkable incident. They said, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." The mention of Galilee at once roused Pilate's attention. "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time." Pilate evidently caught at the opportunity of escaping from a difficulty for which he saw no solution. As a judge he was convinced that our Lord was innocent;

but before him there stood a fierce crowd of Jews, headed by their National Authorities, the Chief Priests and Scribes, clamouring for our Lord's condemnation and death ; and the one thing Pilate dreaded was to occasion a tumult which might endanger his position as Roman Governor. He caught, therefore, at the chance of transferring the whole matter to Herod, who, as it occurred to him, might be glad to exercise his authority. It did not follow, indeed, because our Lord's place of residence and the greater part of His ministry had been within the Galilean jurisdiction of Herod, that Herod alone could judge Him. The offences with which our Lord was charged were committed within Pilate's jurisdiction, and unless Herod took upon himself, with Pilate's consent, to act in the matter, it had to come back to Pilate, as in fact it did : but it was an ingenious device by which Pilate might hope either to be free of the matter altogether, or at least to obtain some assistance from Herod's action in deciding it. Pilate and Herod, we are told afterwards, had been at enmity between themselves, and Pilate seems to have thought it a convenient opportunity for showing Herod some mark of respect. So our Lord was sent as a prisoner to Herod, and Pilate for a short time was relieved of his embarrassment. What followed before Herod is described in the few verses from St. Luke in the text, and within

that short description is contained as amazing and appalling a scene as can be found in any other part of these awful transactions.

Let me remind you who this Herod was. He was a son of Herod the Great, to whom in his father's days some territories in the north of Judea, including Galilee, had been assigned as a subordinate kingdom called the Tetrarchy, and he is sometimes mentioned in the Gospels as Herod the Tetrarch. He held his authority in subjection to Rome, and was ultimately deprived of it by the Roman Emperor. But subject to that authority, he exercised a considerable jurisdiction, and our Lord's life had once been threatened by him. His character is vividly illustrated by a few touches in the Gospels. He comes before us first of all as having taken his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, and living with her in adultery, and denounced for that sin by John the Baptist. St. Luke's account of the Baptist, at the commencement of his Gospel, ends with the statement that "Herod the Tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison." We are told by St. Mark that Herodias was his evil genius, and that there were at first some good inclinations in him. Herodias, says St. Mark, set herself against John

the Baptist, and desired to kill him, "but she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy," and kept him safe, "and when he heard him he did many things, and heard him gladly" (Mark vi. 17–20), so that the woman with whom he sinned was the means of destroying all his better instincts and of dragging him further down.

You know the end of the story, how at a banquet, when the king was inflamed with wine and excitement, the daughter of Herodias danced before him and pleased him, and he recklessly offered to give her whatsoever she would ask, and the implacable hatred of Herodias had beforehand instructed her to ask for the head of John the Baptist in a charger. "And the king was sorry, yet for his oath's sake, and for them that sat at meat with him," that is to say, to escape their taunts at his not keeping his word, he sent and beheaded John in the prison, and his head was brought and given to the damsel, and she brought it to her mother. The news was brought to Jesus, and we are told that when He heard it He withdrew to a desert place apart. He must have been very deeply moved by this barbarous murder of His Forerunner—the greatest of the Prophets, at whose hand He had received His Own Baptism, and who had borne such noble testimony to Him. We hear once again of Herod.

Certain Pharisees once came to Jesus, saying, "Get Thee out and get hence, for Herod would fain kill Thee." He had evidently grown worse since his crime against the Baptist, and instead of the impulses which made him hesitate to injure the Baptist, he was now moved by murderous hatred to our Lord. Our Lord's reply adds another touch to his character. "Go ye," He said, "and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils and perform cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." This character of cunning is borne out by other accounts of him.

Such then is the character before whom our Lord is brought, and to whose judgment He is submitted —a man notorious for lust, violence, deceit, and constantly increasing degradation of character. Could there be a more amazing spectacle and a more appalling contrast? On the one side, our Lord in perfect innocence and purity, truth and the King of Truth, and now witnessing to Jews and Greeks alike of the greatest of all truths; and on the other, His judge, a man who was the embodiment of the worst and most degrading vices, whose injustice and cruelty led before long to his deposition by the Romans themselves. Add a third element in the picture to complete the dreadful spectacle. Our Lord was accompanied by Priests and Levites, who stood and vehemently accused Him—men who were animated by the

deepest hatred of our Lord Himself, and of the truth to which He witnessed. Lust and cruelty and deceit in the judge; malignant hatred of spiritual and moral truth in the Jewish accusers; and between the two, the holy Lord Jesus—innocent, helpless, silent. What is to be the result?

The commencement of the proceedings was of course in the hands of Herod, and his action adds another vile feature to his character. Herod, we are told, "was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see Jesus for a long time, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned with Him in many words." In other words, on this awful occasion, with a solemn accusation, and a prisoner before him of Whose greatness he knew something, he is actuated by nothing better than curiosity. He hoped to have seen some marvel performed by our Lord. He had heard of His miracles, and he was simply desirous of seeing what wonders our Lord could perform. He questioned with Him in many words, trying to satisfy his curiosity about Him, but nothing more. That is the picture of a man whose self-indulgence has extinguished in his mind any sense of the gravity of things, who has sunk down into a mere creature of pleasure and excitement. It is the most disgraceful spectacle in the whole of this history. The Scribes and Pharisees are

at least in earnest. They know too well that deep spiritual issues are involved in their contest with our Lord. They charge Him with blasphemy, and He charges them in return with worse than blasphemy, with rejection of the authority of God Himself in the Person of His Son. It is a really deadly issue, and pregnant with momentous consequences, which is joined between them. Pilate does not understand that issue, but he is at least a judge, and is sensible that his duty is, if he can, to do justice to his Prisoner. He questions Him gravely upon the specific charge which is brought before him, and our Lord recognises his seriousness not only by giving him serious answers, but by opening to him the very centre of His mission on earth. But in this case, the ruler before whom our Lord stands has no thought of anything but the gratification of his own interests and curiosity, and questions our Lord for his own gratification. Pilate's subsequent failure to live up to his conscience in circumstances of grave temptation is deeply reprehensible and melancholy, but the spectacle of a worldly and passionate king caring nothing about the real interests before him, and treating our Lord's appearance almost as a mere matter of amusement, exhibits human nature in its greatest degradation.

Observe the manner in which our Lord dealt

with it. To the Chief Priests and to Pilate He had been silent when questions were asked Him which were irrelevant, or which they had no right to put to Him, but when they touched on the substance of the matter, He replied to them clearly and directly, and to Pilate, as we have seen already and shall see in the sequel, He was especially gracious. But to Herod He had nothing to say. Such a man deserved no answer, and our Lord could treat him with nothing but contempt. What a spectacle it must have been! what a picture may well be conjured up before our eyes of the reckless, tyrannous prince, interested and moved, and seeking to cross-question our Lord, and our Lord standing calm, quiet, and determinately silent, as though He could not deign to listen to a man who had not only stained his life and his hands with the vilest sins, but could not realise, even when a Prisoner was brought before him by the Roman Governor as deemed worthy of hearing, that there was any serious question at issue. That absolute silence of our Lord is really the profoundest mark of indignation in a certain sense, and of contempt that could have been expressed. It is beneath Him to reply to such insults; useless to speak to a man who is capable of them; and He stands—as God Himself seems sometimes to do in history in the presence of great crimes and degradations—without uttering

a word, knowing that the Divine justice will sooner or later assert itself.

Then Herod's disappointment seems to turn to rage, aggravated perhaps by the taunts and accusations of the Chief Priests and Scribes. He can do nothing with our Lord: he is helpless before Him, and so he desires to inflict a public insult upon Him, and he sent Him back to Pilate. "Herod, with his soldiers, set Him at nought," or treated Him as good for nothing, and put on Him a gorgeous white robe—treated Him, that is, as a mock king, claiming to be a King when He was really nothing, and so sent Him back through the streets to Pilate. Pilate understood, as he afterwards explained, that Herod meant to say he could find no serious fault with our Lord, and that He was not worthy of attention; He was only a fit figure to be mocked and despised. There is no scene which is so fitted to warn us of the liability of human nature for utter incapacity to apprehend spiritual realities; of the fact that spiritual issues of the utmost and deadliest gravity may be in course of decision, and the world, men of the world, men whose spiritual and moral sense has been blinded by selfishness and vice, may be utterly unconscious of them. The Lamb of God passing to His sacrifice for the sin of the whole world, the Jews denouncing Him as a malefactor, and the ruler of a large

portion of Judea making a mock of the whole thing—that is what human nature is capable of. Thank God, we may hope our Saviour's Passion, and our knowledge of what followed from it, may have made such utter recklessness impossible for the future, but we are still liable to it in our degree. Some are too much inclined to pass by the events of Holy Week year by year with an indifference which is sad and discreditable, and we none of us enter into the full depth of the tragedy which is being enacted, or into its momentous consequences. God grant that the spectacle of such possibilities in our nature may rouse us to deeper reflection, and lead us to more earnest prayer that God may open our eyes to the things which belong unto our peace.

XII

THE HOLY ONE AND THE JUST

"And the voices of them and of the Chief Priests prevailed."—St. Luke xxiii. 23.

We resume the consideration of the history of our Lord's Passion at the time at which He was brought back to Pilate from His visit to Herod. It will be remembered that as soon as Pilate heard that our Lord was of Galilee and therefore under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him there, no doubt hoping that Herod would take some action which would relieve him of his responsibility in the matter; but our Lord disdained to answer Herod, and Herod with his men of war set Him at naught and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him again to Pilate. Our Lord, therefore, was again before Pilate in the same position as before, with one important exception. Herod's action had shown that nothing worthy of death had been done by Him. The previous accusations of the High Priests had related more particularly to our Lord's words and deeds in Jerusalem and Judea, but Herod would be more cognisant of His action and His

teaching in Galilee, and the result therefore was to clear our Lord from the charges made against Him throughout the whole sphere of His ministry. Neither in Judea nor in Galilee could any capital charge be substantiated against Him.

But the action of Herod had had one other indirect effect which we shall notice presently. Pilate was placed in a position of still greater perplexity by his attempt to elude responsibility. Having refused to act straightforwardly on his own conviction that there was no fault in our Lord, he finds that conviction confirmed by the act of Herod, and yet finds himself still face to face with the bitter and determined demand of the Jewish Priests and rulers for our Lord's being put to death. In this perplexity St. Luke tells us that he called together the Chief Priests and the people. It would seem to have been a new step that he called together the people as well as their rulers. We read afterwards that he knew that the Chief Priests had delivered Him for envy, and Pilate would seem to have thought that the voice of the people might be elicited in our Lord's favour and thus enable him to override the rulers. The Priests had made it a charge against our Lord that "He stirreth up the people, beginning from Galilee to this place," and Pilate must have known of the enthusiastic reception which the people had given our Lord on His entry into Jerusalem this

same week, so he addresses them all, and says, "Ye have brought this Man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this Man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him. No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him, and, lo, nothing worthy of death has been done unto Him. I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him." It seems a strangely unjust conclusion, "I have found no fault in Him . . . I will therefore chastise Him." You will remember, indeed, a similar action on the part of the Jewish Rulers towards the Apostles. When Gamaliel had advised that they should be let alone, as their counsel and work might prove to be of God, the Council agreed with him, and when they had called the Aposties and beaten them, and charged them that they should not speak in the Name of Jesus, they let them go. Pilate evidently thought it might pacify the Jews if he acknowledged that though our Lord had done nothing worthy of death, He might have given undue offence, and that there was consequently some excuse for the accusations against Him. He is evidently seeking by any and every means to avoid what he shrank from—the unjust condemnation of our Lord to death.

At this moment it would seem an incident occurs which deepens his repugnance. St. Matthew

tells us that when he was set down on the judgment seat, for the purpose no doubt of addressing the Priests and people whom he had called together, his wife sent unto him, saying, "Have thou nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him." That dream may well be regarded as another instance of the grace and gentleness with which God dealt throughout those transactions with Pilate. Our Lord treats him with a merciful consideration which he does not extend to the Jewish rulers. They were acting against light and knowledge: their hearts were hardened; and our Lord knew and said that it would be no use appealing to them: but to Pilate, as we have seen in previous meditations, He condescends to explanation to remove his prejudice, and His last word to him is one of mercy, "Therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." In this spirit one more warning is sent to him from God through his wife. She is said to have been a proselyte to the Jewish faith, as was not uncommon at this time among Roman ladies, and it is evident from her message that she must have known our Lord's character and teaching. Divine communications by means of dreams are among the most clearly attested facts in the Scriptures, and particularly in the New Testament. The dreams, for instance, vouchsafed

to St. Paul are attested both by him and by St. Luke. Together with the appearances and utterances of Angels, they give us unquestionable assurance of the manner in which the course of sacred history, and doubtless of all history, is controlled and guided by the hand of God.

The manner in which our Lord is described in Pilate's wife's message is very significant. He is "that just Man." Pilate echoes the expression afterwards, when he exclaims, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person." The same expression again is used by St. Peter in his speech to the people after the healing of the lame man. "Ye denied," he said, "the Holy One and the Just." The impression our Lord had given to those whose hearts were open to appreciate Him was that He was the incarnation of justice or righteousness. That indeed was His real offence. He stood throughout His life before the people, before the Priests and Pharisees and Scribes, and before the people at large, as "the just Man." He brought justice and righteousness to bear upon their consciences, and it was an unwelcome experience for them. That was the very character which the great Greek philosopher had foreseen would arouse all the hatred of human nature. It was the perfectly just man who, as he predicted, would be cast out of human society with hatred and violence. The word brings in fact to a focus the very essence

of the scene we are contemplating. Every one is perpetrating injustice, the Priests and Herod and Pilate. All are doing either violent or cowardly injustice, and our Lord stands calmly in the midst saying and doing only what is just. "To this end was I born," as He had said, "and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." That is the central reality in the great drama of the world, and this scene contains the whole essence of it. Christ the Truth is standing in the midst of the world still, and those who are of the truth hear His voice, but the great mass of the world is unjust and doing unjust things and saying untrue things, and sooner or later their indignation is brought to a head and manifested in some great tragedy or social convulsion. To think of our Lord as here described by Pilate's wife as "the just Man" declaring the truth, and acting with perfect justice, is in one aspect consoling and encouraging amidst the evils around us, since it assures us that they are being justly dealt with. But in another aspect it is a thought of profound awe, and compels us to exclaim, "If Thou, Lord, should be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?" Thank God, we may proceed with the Psalmist, "But there is mercy with Thee. Therefore shalt Thou be feared."

Pilate's anxiety to avoid doing our Lord the supreme injustice for which he was called upon is thus quickened and intensified at the critical moment of action, and now another aggravation of his difficulty arises. The multitude whom he had called upon the scene suddenly reminded him of a privilege they enjoyed at the time of the Passover Feast. It was that he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they would —not whomsoever he would, but whomsoever they would—and St. Mark tells us that at this very juncture the multitude, crying aloud, began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. Pilate immediately saw another opportunity for gaining his end of releasing our Lord. "Will ye," he replied at once, "that I release unto you the King of the Jews?" For, says St. Mark, "he knew that the Chief Priests had delivered Him for envy," and he thought accordingly that the people at large might be free of such a motive, and might be willing to claim the King Whom they had lately welcomed so enthusiastically.

But Pilate had not reckoned with the terrible disappointment which the people had experienced respecting our Lord since that triumphal entry. The Priests and Rulers had always resisted and denounced Him, and His welcome by the people was in defiance of them; but they had now seen

our Lord ignominiously taken captive by them and held captive, treated, without resistance, as a blasphemer, forsaken of His own followers, and dragged as a criminal before Pilate's tribunal. They had seen Him also taken to Herod, and by him and his men of war set at naught and mocked, and brought back to Pilate with derision. This is the indirect effect of our Lord's treatment by Herod, to which I have referred before. Our Lord had indeed been declared innocent of any capital crime, but He had also been treated with contempt and He had not resisted it. The glamour which had surrounded the supposed King of the Jews had consequently been completely dispelled, and all interest in Him had gone, or had turned into angry contempt. Pilate, strange to say, was more sensible than any one there that our Lord was a King. He was conscious as it were of the royal atmosphere which surrounded Him, but our Lord's own people were not. He had disappointed them, and when the Chief Priests moved the people that they should ask for the release of another prisoner, they were easily enough persuaded. There was another conspicuous in the eye of the multitude at that moment—one named Barabbas, "who lay bound," as St. Mark tells us, "with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection." There seems no sufficient reason for supposing

as had been suggested, that he was one of the so-called Zealots whose violence was prompted mainly by political motives. At all events, his description as a robber proves that plunder was part of his motives, and there is nothing more astonishing and appalling in this scene than that his name should have been even mentioned side by side with that of our Lord as a sort of rival for popular favour: on the one side a violent criminal, on the other side a Just Man. Pilate himself seems to think there could be no doubt that they would ask for the King of the Jews, for he inquires, as a sort of matter of course, "Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?" But, we are told, "the Chief Priests and Elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus."

It is another terrible revelation of the possibilities of wickedness in the human heart. Their action, as Pilate says, was from envy, because they realised that our Lord's claim was morally superior to their own, and because His superior and truer teaching and His works of mercy and power were drawing away the people after Him, because He was just and true, and they were not. They were filled with a rage unequalled in history, and stirred up the people that they should claim for release "not this Man, but Barabbas." It would almost seem,

as we read and meditate over these scenes, that every passion is at a greater intensity and violence than we can well realise in the present day. The whole, or almost the whole, body of the ruling and teaching class of the Jews clamouring for the judicial murder of the only perfect Holy Person Who ever lived, and the multitude roused by them into a passionate rage for the destruction of Him Whom they had lately claimed as their King, and vehemently overbearing the remonstrances of the Governor who ventured to plead with them. Criminal as Pilate's conduct was, perhaps we do not always duly appreciate the fury of that scene, nor give him adequate credit for his persistent attempt to quell that storm. "Pilate, therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him. And he said unto them again the third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified." Pilate had put it to them as an obstacle to the release of Barabbas, "What will ye then that I shall do unto Him Whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify Him"; and so St. Luke concludes, "The voices of them and of the Chief Priests prevailed."

XIII

RESIST NOT EVIL

"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see ye to it.

"Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children." ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 24, 25.

WE have reached in these meditations the point at which the Jewish people and the Chief Priests prevailed over the appeals of Pilate, but he did not give way without a significant protest which, though futile in itself, had one terrible consequence. "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made . . . he washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see ye to it." There would have been some force in that disclaimer if Pilate had been really yielding to force. But he was not yielding to force, he was yielding to the fear of consequences. He feared a tumult with all its possible bloodshed, and probably he had reason further to fear his own disgrace by the Roman authority for failing to keep the peace in his province. But that was no sufficient excuse for committing what he knew to be wicked

injustice. It would be well if the example were more laid to heart than it is by those who are in authority at any time of great popular disturbance. There is always a strong temptation on such occasions to give way rather than maintain resistance at the cost of some grave convulsion; and if the difference between the two courses at issue be merely one of expediency, concession may often be right; but where there is a clear question of right involved, nothing can ever justify surrender, and there is the further consideration to be borne in mind which is illustrated by the subsequent course of this history. If concession be made to wrong, peace may be secured for a time, but God's justice is sure to assert itself in the end and so work out a vengeance far more terrible in its character than the convulsion which firmness might have involved at the first. The murder of our Lord avenged itself by far more awful consequences to the Jewish people than any that could have followed from an uprising of the Jewish mob at this moment.

Moreover, it should be observed that the action required of Pilate was one of which no man can wash his hands. A man may perhaps be physically forced in certain circumstances to perform some bodily action, but no man can be forced by any physical compulsion to make a mental resolution or to come to a moral decision. However strong

the temptation, however great the pressure, the final decision requires an act of a man's own will which no external power can control. This is the key to all martyrdoms. A martyr might have his flesh torn off him, as was often done, until his very vitals were exposed, but no infliction of torture could reach that inner shrine of the will which forbade him saying the single word which would have renounced allegiance to his Master. Pilate was in authority. It depended solely on his will to give or withhold the order for our Lord's scourging and crucifixion. No Jewish mob, no Jewish priesthood could force that utterance from his mouth, and it was consequently impossible for him to wash his hands of responsibility for giving the order. A man who is convinced of the reality and supremacy of truth and justice, and who has resolved to adhere to them at all costs, is safe in such a crisis, but Pilate was not of that mould. The question he had asked of our Lord in a private interview, "What is truth?" indicates the whole character of his mind. Lord Bacon has doubtless pointed to the true significance of that question in the opening words of his essay on Truth, "'What is truth?' said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer." The reality of truth and justice was indeed being brought home to him with a terrible vividness by the Presence of the Truth itself before him in the Person of our Lord, and

he was compelled to feel the tremendous claim which it had made upon him. But he had been too long asking the question lightly to apprehend the answer at this critical moment of his life. He shrank from the demands it made upon him, and was lost. He is the most conspicuous example in history of this disastrous incapacity to hold by truth and justice at the cost of any sacrifice; but a similar incapacity, in the presence of far less severe temptations, is the secret of all the sins and failures of our lives, and Pilate may yet do some good if his example brings home to us the fact that the very nerve and central spring of life is devotion to truth and justice at all costs.

But though Pilate's disclaimer of responsibility was futile as regards himself, it elicited a tremendous acceptance of responsibility from the Jews themselves. In answer to his declaration, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us, and on our children." Such an exclamation gives us an appalling conception of the fury to which the passion of the people had now risen. Its flood had risen higher with every check which Pilate opposed to it, and now when nothing stood between them and their object but his dread of responsibility for shedding innocent blood, they eagerly overbore

him by taking the whole responsibility not only on themselves but on their children. "His blood be on us, and on our children." Is not the history of the Jewish people since that time in great measure the dread fulfilment of that awful vow? Within a single generation after it was uttered, their city was destroyed and its inhabitants almost exterminated in scenes of blood and fire and vapour of smoke, more horrible probably than the world has ever seen, and they have ever since been a homeless, and for the most part, persecuted race. That Christians have shamed their faith and their Christianity in such persecutions does not alter the fact that the Jews have suffered this penalty, and are still in some measure suffering it. The steady, persistent, silent working out of the judgments of God in life and history is one of the most overwhelming proofs that there is a living God and eternal Judge. The scenes we are contemplating are those of the greatest crime ever committed or that ever could be committed on this earth—the rejection and the murder of the Son of God by His Own people, whom He had chosen and disciplined and taught and tended, and after all, they did but acknowledge the inevitable result when they exclaimed, "His blood be on us and on our children." If Pilate could not escape his responsibility for that Blood, neither could they, and it has visibly rested on

them in history. Neither, let us be assured, can we escape responsibility for any act of faithlessness to our duty, or for any unjust sufferings which our sins may bring on others. It is no use trying to wash our hands of them. Whether we avowedly accept them or not, they will remain attached to us, and it is only the blood of this innocent Victim, and the mercy of our Judge, which will relieve us.

Then, at last, the awful question was decided. "Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will." But the execution of the sentence of our Lord remained in his hands, not in theirs. As St. John tells us, "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His Head, and they put on Him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote Him with their hands." You are too familiar, no doubt, with all that this means. You know that the Roman scourging was the introductory cruelty of crucifixion, so terrible as to be called "an intermediate death." The sufferer was stripped naked, and scourged with terrible thongs till his whole body was covered with wounds and blood. In this state our Lord was taken by the soldiers

into the common hall, and their whole band was gathered together, and then they proceeded to the bitter mockery and cruel violence which the Evangelists describe. No doubt their conduct was prompted not so much by animosity to our Lord, for they would have known comparatively little about Him. As our Saviour said of those who nailed Him to the Cross, "They know not what they do." It was doubtless mainly prompted by hatred and contempt of the Jews, and they found it a welcome opportunity for indulging their scorn and indignation at the pretensions of the Jewish people, in claiming independence and avowing their hopes of a Messiah Who would establish their superiority over other nations. We know that ideas were current in the Roman world at this time that some conquering King would soon appear in the East. In point of fact a conqueror did appear, and was there present in the despised and insulted King of the Jews; and it is striking to remember that in less than three hundred years the Roman Standards were lowered before the Name of that King, and the very Person who underwent that scourging and insult was acknowledged as supreme over Cæsar himself, and over the whole Roman world.

But His power was entirely a spiritual one, and it was only by the slow operation of spiritual influences that it could be established. Our Lord

refused to appeal to any other influence or power even in this hour of His bitter agony. What He said to His disciples in Gethsemane remained true still, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" His suffering had not come upon Him as any surprise, for He had distinctly predicted it to His disciples. "The Son of Man," He had said, "shall be betrayed unto the Chief Priests and Scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify Him." All this He had foreseen in that agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, and now He was enduring it with calm resolution, and without even the suggestion, except to Pilate himself, that He had the power to resist if He had chosen to do so. In the face of all these terrible scenes, the most momentous and wonderful fact for us to bear in mind is that it was all endured voluntarily. Our Lord might, in one moment, have crushed the soldiery and Pilate himself, and the Chief Priests and Scribes. The taunt on the Cross was untrue—"Himself He cannot save." He could have saved Himself at any moment, but He would not. He would not, in this great spiritual struggle, meet physical force by physical force, and was content to

allow the furious passion of the mob and of the soldiery to work themselves out upon Him.

It is this voluntary endurance of all this suffering which gives it its supreme value as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It was not simply inflicted upon our Lord; it was voluntarily offered by Him to His Father, and is still pleaded by Him as the ground for His prayer that all men, even those who inflicted it, may be forgiven. But at this stage I only notice the point in passing. What I would for the present be content to observe is that this simple patience and endurance of our Saviour, this refusal to meet force with force in a spiritual cause, has had a profound effect in the subsequent history of the Church and of the world, in establishing for ever a new example and a new method in maintaining great religious and moral causes. Men had indeed, like Socrates, submitted patiently to unjust sentences before; but the injustice here was so extreme, so brutal, so conspicuous, that it brought out into the strongest possible relief the infinite patience which was exhibited, and the profound character of the resolution, on which our Saviour was acting, to offer no resistance, but to commit Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. Before long, Christians throughout the Roman Empire were called upon to renounce their faith under penalty of sufferings not unlike, even in severity,

those which our Saviour underwent, and when that time came they had their example before them in the conduct of our Lord at this time. He had set them an unmistakable example that when they were reviled they should not revile again, when they suffered, they should not threaten, but simply adhere patiently to their faith and let their persecutors do their worst. They could not but follow Him, and the consequence was, as one of the early Fathers legitimately boasts, that even when the Christians were in some parts of the Roman Empire something like half the population, they did not attempt to combine or to rise in self-defence. They raised no legions, as they might have done, for their own protection, but simply said the truth and acted justly, and endured any consequences which might follow.

The consequence was similar to that which followed in the case of our Lord. The spiritual faith and truth thus manifested produced a greater effect upon the world than could have been produced by any forcible resistance, even if that resistance had been successful. In the case of our Lord, and in the case of the martyrs who followed Him, there was evidence to the heart and conscience of the world of the existence of spiritual realities for which it was an honour, a glory, and even a delight to suffer. The soul of the Saviour in all its holiness and meekness

and truth was manifested to angels and men and to the world ever since, in and through this patient endurance and these sufferings, more clearly than it has been or could have been by any other means; and similarly, the testimony of the martyrs, suffering in silence, revealed the faith in which they lived with a clearness which no antagonistic force and no arguments or reasonings possessed. Patiently to suffer for the truth's sake became, from the hour of these suffering of the Saviour, the great spiritual instrument of illumination, of moral and religious power. It is a lesson and an example which has been the salvation of the world in subsequent ages. The world is so constituted that, in the course of those great religious movements by which the destiny of mankind and the whole course of history is determined, there have in age after age arisen crises at which the issue is put to the arbitration of blood, in which the dominant force in the world—like the Scribes and Pharisees in our Lord's day, like the persecuting Emperors in the Roman Empire, like the Roman Church and the Roman Catholic monarchs at the Reformation—declares nothing less than war against those who would reform the existing state of Religion and morals, and endeavours to suppress them by tortures and death. It would be rash to say that such trials may not come again, for human nature remains

the same in its general character, and what it has been capable of in the past it may be capable of in the future. But the Saviour's example ensured that such war should be met, when it was proclaimed, by the same patience and endurance, by similarly simple reliance on the force of truth and justice, and by means of that patience and endurance bring home to men the invincible character of the spiritual realities by which they were inspired. "The Son of God, indeed, goes forth to War," but those "who follow in His train" are not those who exert the forces and instruments of warfare, but those who suffer them.

> "The martyr first, whose eagle eye
> Could pierce beyond the grave; . . .
> A noble army, men and boys,
> The matron and the maid;
> They saw their Master in the sky,
> And call'd on Him to save."

The Saviour thus established the principle that to endure suffering in the cause of truth and justice is a far more powerful means of overcoming wrong than to resist it. The terrible scene we have been contemplating thus established a new method and a new hope in the spiritual and moral struggle of mankind, and nerved the best life of the future for its long warfare with evil. "O God, to us may grace be given to follow in their train."

XIV

THE CRIME CONSUMMATED

"Pilate therefore went forth again and saith unto them," etc.—St. John xix. 4.

A very strange and unexpected scene followed upon the scourging and mocking of our Saviour by the soldiery, with which we concluded our meditations yesterday. It is narrated by St. John alone. The other Evangelists pass straight from the scourging to the Crucifixion. St. Matthew, for instance, says that "When Pilate had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified," and that is in brief a correct account of what happened. But St. John tells us of a very impressive incident which occurred between the scourging and the final sentence of crucifixion. He tells us that immediately after the scourging "Pilate went forth again and saith unto them, Behold, I bring Him forth to you that ye may know that I find no fault in Him. Then came Jesus forth wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, and Pilate saith unto them, Behold the Man." It is a very extraordinary thing that Pilate should thus have made a further appeal to the Jews.

No less than three times, as we saw yesterday, had he declared our Lord's innocence and asked why He should be crucified. "He said unto them," we read, "a third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I find no cause of death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go." But they remained obdurate, and then "the voices of them and of the Chief Priests prevailed." Pilate washed his hands before them as a sign that he repudiated all responsibility, and gave Jesus up to be scourged. His decision was thus taken and he had acted upon it in directing that our Lord should be scourged, and so far as he was concerned one would have supposed that the matter was concluded. What, then, is it that induces him suddenly to go back upon his decision and to make another appeal to the Jews in our Lord's favour? It would seem a deplorable display of weakness and vacillation, and some strong influence must have worked on Pilate's mind to bring him to put himself into such a position.

There would seem to be only one possible explanation, which is suggested by Pilate's pathetic exclamation which has appealed to Christian thought and Christian art with such intense force: "Behold the Man," *Ecce Homo*. As Pilate thus took our Lord out from the common hall of the soldiers, he must have been present and must have witnessed the scourging and the mocking, and our

Lord's demeanour under this cruel infliction must have produced a deep impression upon Pilate's heart. The patience, the meekness, the dignity with which it was all borne must have penetrated his soul. It may have confirmed his conviction of our Lord's perfect goodness and innocence, and must have aroused, even in his heart, a deep feeling of compassion. It is evidently by a sudden and overmastering impulse that Pilate is thus moved, at the cost of stultifying his previous action, to take our Lord away from the soldiery and bring Him again to the Jews. The words with which he introduced Him indicate the impression which the scene of the scourging had produced on his mind. Once again, he says, "Behold, I bring Him forth to you that ye may know that I find no fault in Him." That conviction, which was settled in Pilate's mind, had evidently been intensely deepened by our Lord's bearing under the torture and the insults of the scourging and the mocking. We could not have a more striking indication of the supreme and Divine grace which our Lord must have manifested than that it should have produced a convulsion of this kind in the mind of a man like Pilate, even after he had hardened his heart to order the punishment. Scourging was sometimes inflicted as a means of examining prisoners, as in the case of St. Paul, when, on his arrest in Jerusalem, the Chief Captain

directed that he should be examined by scourging. It was not with that purpose that the scourging had been inflicted in this case, but as a preliminary to the infliction of crucifixion. But in Pilate's mind it had had the effect of such an examination, and it had convinced him still more of the absolute innocence of the sufferer. It must have been something like an agony of conviction which compelled Pilate thus to come forth again before the crowd with this reiterated declaration of our Lord's innocence.

"Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe," with all the marks upon His sacred Body of the cruel scourging He had undergone, and of the mockery with which He had been insulted. "Behold the Man," exclaims Pilate. He does not speak of Him as he had done before, as the King of the Jews: he does not exclaim, as he did immediately afterwards, "Behold your King": he says only, "Behold the Man"—Behold this innocent sufferer with a visage more marred than any man. If, he seems to suggest, He has committed no fault, has He not been punished enough? Pilate seems to fall back on his former suggestion that he would chastise Him and release Him. But it is of no avail, or at least of not sufficient avail. St. John says that as soon as the "Chief Priests and Officers saw Him, they cried

out loudly, saying, Crucify Him, Crucify Him." The expression "the Chief Priests and Officers" seems to deserve special attention. Before the scourging in answer to Pilate's appeal, it is said that they cried out all at once—the Chief Priests and people together; but now it is said that the Chief Priests and Officers, that is the Chief Priests and their subordinates, raise the cry, and it is not said that the people at once joined in. It would seem as though Pilate's appeal to the spectacle of our Saviour in His suffering had some effect upon the people at large, and it is a relief to be able to believe that the whole Jewish people were not absolutely impenetrable to the feeling of sympathy and pity which had softened even Pilate's heart. It should be remembered that we are told previously that the Chief Priests and Elders persuaded the people that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The malignity and the determination of the Chief Priests and Elders was the motive force which urged the people to their fanatical outcry against our Lord: and now it would seem that the moment our Lord appeared the Priests and their servants anticipated the danger of a movement of remorse among the people by their instant cry, "Crucify, Crucify." It was not "Crucify Him," as you will be reminded by the word "Him" being printed in italics in our version. It is, as Bishop Westcott observes,

the short, sharp "Crucify! Crucify!" Such is their eagerness to forestall the people, and give them no time for feeling or for thought. Pilate then turns on them with a tone of disgust, "Take ye Him and Crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him" —once more "I find no fault in Him." It suggests to us: "If your foul work must be done, do it yourselves." It was again a futile exclamation, for he knew they could not do it themselves, as he alone could order the punishment of crucifixion, but there could not be a better expression of his contempt and disgust, and aversion from the revolting injustice he was called upon to perpetrate.

Then the Jews in their turn are forced to the utterance of what had been the real motive in their action. They had put forward hitherto various semi-political pleas which they thought might be enough for the occasion, as that our Lord perverted the nation and forbade to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King: but that which had led to His condemnation before the Jewish Council was His distinct avowal that He was the Son of God, and would hereafter be seen at the right hand of God, coming in the clouds of Heaven. The final question and answer in that trial had been when the High Priest asked Him and said unto Him, "Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" and Jesus

said, "I am, and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power and coming in the clouds of Heaven." That was the real essence of our Lord's offence, and there were doubtless members of the Council who, like St. Paul, at the outset, earnestly believed that the claim was blasphemous, though their convictions were not the motive power in the condemnation, but were used by Caiaphas and other High Priests for the gratification of their malignant hatred—what St. Matthew calls, their envy. But no doubt the real issue between the Jewish authorities and our Lord was that He claimed to be God. Probably the Jews did not think that Pilate would appreciate the gravity of this charge. The word "God" could not mean as much to a Gentile—especially a Gentile like Pilate—as it meant to a Jew, and therefore they had hitherto kept their real motive in the background; but at length being forced back upon their ultimate reasons by Pilate's persistence, they answered him, "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." "We have a law," they said. It was expressly provided by the conditions of the Roman Government that the Jews should enjoy the free exercise of their religion and the observance of their own religious laws. The punishment for blasphemy, according to the Book of Leviticus, was stoning,

and under this law St. Stephen was stoned; but when Pilate had said at the commencement of our Lord's trial before him, "Take ye Him and judge Him according to your law," they had replied, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death," "That the saying," says St. John, "of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spake, signifying by what death He should die."

But their putting forward this charge against our Lord had a precisely opposite effect from that which they anticipated, for it revived and deepened Pilate's apprehension of the extraordinary character of our Lord, and he took our Lord back into the Judgment Hall and said to Him with evident solemnity, "Whence art Thou?" But Jesus gave him no answer. There has been much discussion as to why our Lord refused Pilate any answer, but one simple consideration seems to be sufficient explanation. Pilate had just allowed our Lord to be scourged; he had inflicted on Him that gross injustice and cruelty, though acknowledging that He was innocent. How could our Lord, consistently with His dignity, condescend to reply without hesitation to a man who had done Him this wicked injustice? St. Paul, on a similar occasion, when the magistrates who had scourged him sent him a conciliatory message, replied indignantly, "They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and now do they

thrust us out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and bring us out." It was fitting and inevitable that our Saviour, the victim of that far grosser outrage, should similarly indicate His just indignation to the author of the insult. If this is significant of His dignity, the utterance to which He does consent is equally significant of His grace. Pilate exclaims in surprise and perhaps some anger, "Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee and have power to release Thee?" And then our Lord's pity seems aroused for the error which this struggling, vacillating, Roman Governor is making as to his own position. Pilate spoke as if he were master of the situation, and our Lord would undeceive him. Jesus answered, "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above. Therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." In other words, "Your power over Me depends simply on the fact that by God's permission you are in authority here and can pronounce sentence upon Me. I have been, by God's permission, placed in your power and subjected to your judgment, and you have to act in the matter whether you will or no; but the person who delivered Me unto you—meaning, of course, the High Priest—acted on his own initiative. It was he who, with others, conspired to deliver

Me into your hands, and he therefore hath the greater sin." Could there be a more profound exhibition of mercy than that, even when suffering the bitter injustice of scourging at Pilate's hands, our Lord should condescend to speak to him, not for the purpose of self-defence, but simply in order to lighten the burden of guilt on Pilate's soul, and to assure him that our Lord did not lay the chief blame of His murder upon him. It is in reference to Pilate exactly what our Lord's words on the Cross were with respect to the soldiers who nailed Him to the Cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." If the Saviour Himself could pronounce this mitigation of Pilate's guilt, we could surely ourselves entertain some pity for his weakness and sin.

"And from henceforth," we read, "Pilate sought to release Him." The word implies a continuous effort, and it would seem therefore that Pilate must have in some form or other continued his resistance to the demand of the Jews for our Lord's crucifixion, and must have maintained his appeal to the rulers for His release. But then, with peculiar baseness and malignity, it occurred to the Jewish leaders to overbear Pilate's resistance by an appeal to his fears, which could only be done by a base surrender on their own part of their national hopes and aspirations. The Roman Emperor of the day, Tiberius, was a

man of cruelly suspicious nature, and it would only have been necessary to lay a charge of disloyalty against Pilate, at Rome, in order to place him in the greatest danger. Accordingly, they cried out, "If thou let this Man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend. Whosoever maketh himself a King, speaketh against Cæsar." That was at last decisive to Pilate. When Pilate heard that saying he knew that he was practically compelled to choose between his own life and that of our Lord. So St. John says, "When Pilate heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the Judgment Seat in the place that is called The Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha." It will be observed he did not sit down in the Judgment Seat previously to pronouncing the definite sentence of crucifixion. When he ordered our Lord to be scourged the final sentence of crucifixion had not been pronounced; he had reserved to himself the possibility of escape from it, hoping to the last that after this scourging the Jews might possibly be satisfied: but now all hope of moving the mind of the Jewish Rulers being gone and his own position and his own life being at stake, he takes his place on the Judgment Seat to pronounce the sentence.

But before doing so, he is forced by the indignation and disgust in his mind to give expression to it in a final taunt to the Jews—a taunt unworthy

of a magistrate, but indicating the violent conflict of emotions and convictions in his mind. He saith unto the Jews, "Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King?" There seems a strange confused double meaning in the taunt, as though he would say, This—the Man before you—is the sort of King for you Jews; and yet there is the contrary conviction still in his mind that, after all, our Lord was a King—the conviction which led him to write as the title on the Cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." He does not know what he means, and hardly knows what he is doing. "The Chief Priests answered, We have no King but Cæsar." What a declaration for the Rulers of the Jewish nation, whose very office it was to proclaim and to maintain that God was their King, and who were the guardians of the prophecies of centuries that a Messiah, an anointed King, was the hope and promise of their race! It was a surrender, for the sake of gratifying their malignant hatred of our Lord, of all the hopes and privileges of their nation. But to this had these terrible passions of envy and hatred brought them. It was the last word in these scenes of rage and blind enmity and cowardly weakness. "Then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified." To this and to a

crime like this, can men be brought by faithlessness to their conscience and their conviction, by fear of man and failure to trust in God. Let us pray that God may preserve us in our place and degree from the consequences in our own lives of similar disasters and scenes.

XV

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

"But Jesus turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children . . ." —ST. LUKE xxiii. 28.

THE last address in which we considered the history of our Lord's Passion brought us to the dreadful moment when, as the Evangelists express it, they led Him away, or led Him out, to be crucified. St. John tells us that He went out "bearing the Cross for Himself." That was the custom, that the prisoner condemned to crucifixion should bear his own cross to the place of execution, and our Lord submitted patiently to this as to all the other customary cruelties and indignities of crucifixion. But though the Evangelists speak of His suffering with singular reticence, it is evident that the cruel violence He had suffered during the last few hours had rendered Him unequal to bearing such a burden over the road from the place of His condemnation to that of His death; for we read in St. Matthew that "as they came out they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; him they compelled to go with them to bear

His Cross." St. Mark says that they "led Him out to crucify Him, and they compel one passing by, Simon a Cyrenian, coming from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to go with them that he might bear His Cross." St. Luke's account is that "as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and laid on him the Cross to bear it after Jesus." It is evident that our Saviour was at once seen to be unequal to bearing the burden of His Cross, and that as they led Him out they saw that it was necessary to find some other means of carrying it. The very officers of the law and the soldiers would not touch an instrument of punishment so degrading as the Cross. It was to them like handling the gallows would be among ourselves. For the same reason no one else is asked to carry it; but a man of Cyrene who happened to be coming from the country, was "impressed" to render this service. The statement that he was coming from the country doubtless means that he was coming into Jerusalem for the festival, and encountered the procession of the crucifiers of our Lord as they were going out. The soldiers at once laid hold on him and compelled him, whether he would or not, to discharge this painful service. The word used is one which was common in Eastern countries for impressing private service for public business.

It is very characteristic that St. Mark gives the personal description of him, that he was Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Cyrene holds a somewhat conspicuous place in the history of the New Testament. It was a city in North Africa, in which there was a large colony of Jews. It was in close intercourse with Jerusalem, and among those who were present on the Day of Pentecost we read of some from the parts of Lybia about Cyrene. We read also that among those who opposed St. Stephen were "certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and of the Cyrenians" and others. They were evidently conspicuous among the foreign Jews. It is, moreover, a touch of personal reality that St. Mark should speak of Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus. His Gospel has close associations with Rome, and in the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul says, "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." It is natural to surmise that the Rufus thus referred to at Rome is the son of Simon thus mentioned by St. Mark as a person who would be well known to those for whom his Gospel was first written, and if so we have the interesting probability that the family of Simon, his wife and his sons, became Christians. The expression "Rufus . . . his mother and mine" indicates an affectionate

association with St. Paul. It is natural to conclude therefore that the consequence of Simon being compelled to render this last office to our Lord was that he became a believer in Him. There is a peculiar value in these personal touches as indicating that the story is, as it were, told from the life, and not from traditional reminiscences.

We enter from this moment upon the Way of the Cross, the *Via Dolorosa*, around which Christian thought has lingered so earnestly and so tenderly. It is necessary to say that the accounts which have been handed down by tradition of details of that road of suffering are due to tradition alone. A learned and instructive Roman Catholic work on the Life and Passion of our Lord, published a few years ago, says that several of those supposed "stations" find no point of support in the Gospels. "There was no real intention," says another learned Roman Catholic writer, "to furnish historical and topographical details for these 'Stations.'" In the first thousand years, we are told by the same writer, we read of a regular way, over which the pilgrims to the religious places were conducted, but there is no trace of following the Way of the Cross, or of the division of that way into stations. The first trace of any fixing of special points in this manner is found about the year 1187. As

to subsequent accounts of the various places of suffering, it seems to be impossible to trace the description of the *Via Crucis*, the Way of the Cross, further back than the beginning of the fifteenth century. The later development of the idea of the Way of the Cross was due to the Franciscans; but after much variation as to both the number and order of the so-called "Stations," it was only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the present customary series of "Stations" on the road of Sorrow, and their order, was developed. They cannot, in fact, be reconciled with the narratives of the Evangelists, and could not be brought into harmony with the profoundly touching and instructive occurrence which St. Luke proceeds immediately to relate. The matter is worth this passing notice as an illustration of the manner in which the simple and touching narratives of our Lord's Passion have been overlaid and obscured not only in the Roman Catholic Church, but unfortunately at the present day in our own, by these unhistorical and imaginary incidents.

In fact, between our Lord's being led from the place of the condemnation to that of His execution, there are only two incidents mentioned by the Evangelists. One is the transfer to Simon of the burden of the Cross, the other is the incident just referred to, which is mentioned only by

St. Luke, I mean, His being followed by a great company of women who bewailed and lamented Him. The expression is a strong one—they beat their breasts and wailed for Him. That single incident is more than enough to bring before us the distressing nature of the scene. There is no indication that the women who followed Him belonged specially to the faithful band who had accompanied Him from Galilee. Our Lord, in the words which follow, speaks of them as "Daughters of Jerusalem"—not necessarily implying that they were all inhabitants of Jerusalem, but probably only referring to their common character as Jewish women. The women, of course, were the most conspicuous in their gestures and cries of grief, but they were accompanied by a great multitude of people also. It is evident that although, owing to disappointment at our Lord's failure to assert His Messiahship, and under the incitement of the Priests and Rulers, the mass of the people had turned against Him and had joined in the savage claim for His crucifixion, many, not only the women who were specially faithful to Him, but of the multitude as a whole, were still devoted to Him and were distressed at His fate. It is satisfactory to bear in mind this evidence that nothing so unnatural occurred as a complete revulsion of the whole people against our Lord. It would not be credible

that, twenty-four hours before, the Priests and Rulers had actually failed to arrest our Lord on account of the devotion of the people to Him, and that on a sudden the whole multitude had revolted from Him and clamoured for His crucifixion. This one scene, pictured for us by the Evangelist on the Way of the Cross, relieves the dark story a little by showing that there were those who openly bewailed and lamented Him. It seems worth observing that they were not apparently checked in these manifestations of sympathy and grief, either by the Roman or Jewish authorities. But there was one Person who checked them, and that was our Lord Himself. "Jesus, turning unto them" (observe the gesture—He does not merely utter a passing admonition even in that distress and weakness, but roused Himself to turn and face them, and address them solemnly and deliberately), "Daughters of Jerusalem," He said, "weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

That utterance at this moment with the Cross

before His eyes affords one of the chief revelations of our Lord's heart in this last agony. "Weep not," He says, "for Me." There is nothing more Divine in His demeanour than His absolute suppression of Himself throughout these scenes. It is striking to bear in mind that St. Luke, who alone of the Evangelists records this incident, is also the only one to record another scene of tears in this sad history, when our Saviour, in the midst of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, "beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." Endeavour to realise the absolute forgetfulness of self in that utterance. As the Saviour foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem, so He knew only too well that in a very few days He Himself would be betrayed and condemned by the Chief Priests and Rulers, and crucified. But He does not weep for that, He weeps over the City which contains His Father's House, and which was the home of His people,

who were the people of God, and He weeps over their children. It may well seem a characteristic touch of tenderness in both cases that He specially mentions the children. It is a precisely parallel feeling that in this last agonising moment, He deprecates any tears for Himself but utters a tender warning and lament over the Daughters of Jerusalem and their children. It has been noticed by the best commentators with what infinite pathos the appeal is specially addressed to the women. The supreme desire of a true Jewish woman's heart was to become the mother of children, and when the Saviour impresses on them by a threefold warning that this very blessing would be turned into a curse to them, He pierces the very hearts of the Mothers in Israel. "The days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck." That was to tell them in the most poignant tones that the curse they were bewailing in Him would return tenfold on their own hearts.

But this admonition of the Saviour, "Weep not for Me," carries a gracious admonition to ourselves as to the spirit in which we should chiefly contemplate our Saviour's sufferings. It bids remember that His personal suffering is not the principal thing to be considered in the scenes we are this week commemorating. There is,

indeed, a self-abnegation which can only be fitly described as Divine in this disregard of His own sufferings, but yet, even from the highest human point of view, the tendency which has often prevailed to concentrate attention on the physical sufferings of the Cross is not worthy of such an occasion. There is a truer note in the old Church Hymns which look on that struggle of the Cross as a great battle, and which rather speak with homage and exultation of the endurance of the Saviour and of His victory in so bitter a contest:

> "Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle,
> Sing the last, the dread affray;
> O'er the Cross, the Victor's trophy,
> Sound the high triumphal lay,
> How, the pains of death enduring,
> Earth's Redeemer won the day."

It was a battle won by patient endurance, but a battle it was with all the powers of evil: and though our tears may be shed over the soldiers who fall and suffer in any great battle, it is on their endurance and on their glory that our thoughts are chiefly fixed. So our Saviour, speaking in the midst of that great struggle, deprecates from the devoted women who follow Him mere tears for His sufferings. He bids them fix their thoughts on the battle itself, and its significance for themselves and for their children. In fact, as is shown

by this passage, and by His previous lament over Jerusalem, that on which the Saviour's mind was fixed was the doom which was impending for the city and people which He loved, and which He knew would fall on them in consequence of their rejection of Himself. It was not merely as a punishment for their rejection and murder of Himself that He knew that doom must fall. It was in consequence of the sins and the falsehood to truth and righteousness which led to that rejection of Himself. By their faithlessness to truth, to the message sent to them by a long line of prophets they were bringing their nation into a condition which rendered its ruin certain, at once by internal dissolution and by external force. Their one hope was to listen to the last of the prophets who had been sent to them, to the only Son, Whom their Father had sent to them; and when they rejected Him their last hope was gone. That was the grief which filled His mind even in this agonising hour. As Keble has beautifully expressed it, "His is a Saviour's woe." It is for us to learn the same lesson from this utterance of the Saviour to the Daughters of Jerusalem. It would be of little avail to us to mourn and lament over the Saviour's sufferings unless we bear in mind that the same causes which brought about those sufferings—similar faithlessness, similar selfishness, similar indifference to truth — must

needs bring similar wreck and ruin to our own country and our own city, unless we take to heart in time the message which He brought us, "Repent, since the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

XVI

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do."—ST. LUKE xxiii. 34.

FROM the scene which we considered on the last occasion, when our Lord turned and addressed the women who bewailed and lamented Him, the Evangelists pass straight to our Lord's arrival at the place of His crucifixion, and simply say, "There they crucified Him." They do not dwell on any of the cruel circumstances of that exquisite torture, and it would be inconsistent with their example to add any such details to their narrative. It is enough to say that they crucified Him with some circumstances of greater cruelty—such as the nailing of His hands and feet—than were inflicted on the malefactors who were crucified with Him; but it may be that the severer torture brought with it a quicker death, and thus saved Him from the final cruelty and inhumanity of the breaking of the legs which was suffered by the others, so that the prophecy was fulfilled, "A bone of Him shall not be broken." It is a very remarkable fact that the site of Golgotha or

Calvary is even yet uncertain. No fewer than four places have been suggested, and the only thing that seems quite certain is that those which were believed to be the sites, until a very late date, are certainly not the true ones. There appears an increasing agreement that the true site has at last been discovered, but it cannot be asserted indisputably. One would have thought that a spot which must have been the most sacred of all sites—except that of the sepulchre—to a generation of Christians who were co-temporary with the Apostles could never have been forgotten, and it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that its oblivion is a warning from God against concentrating attention on the external circumstances of those sacred scenes, instead of attending mainly to the spiritual realities of the history. Had the sacred places been certainly known, had the true Cross really been preserved, had it been possible to lay hands on the very nails of the Cross, and to visit the tomb where the sacred Body really lay, we cannot but feel, from the later history of the Church, that devotion would have been concentrated almost wholly on these relics instead of being, by the providence of God, forced to take to heart the message of the Angels, "He is not here, for He is risen."

"There they crucified Him," says St. Luke, "and the malefactors, one on the right hand,

and the other on the left," and the received text of St. Mark adds, " and the Scripture was fulfilled which said, He was numbered with the transgressors." The question seems a somewhat idle one which has been raised, whether that addition was part of the original text of the Evangelist. It is at all events true, and it marks one of the most touching, and we may even say one of the most blessed parts of the story. It would seem evident that the order that the two malefactors should be crucified with our Lord must have been given by Pilate, for death by crucifixion could only be executed on his authority, and we may well ask what could have induced him to add this indignity to the circumstances of our Lord's execution. Was it, as has been suggested, that he wished to bring home to the Jewish authorities the depth of their disloyalty to the true King of their nation in making them realise that they had demanded that one Who claimed to be the King of the Jews should be treated as no better than a robber and a murderer? It is conceivable: but at all events the result has been of the deepest and most blessed significance. Taken together with our Saviour's gracious words to one of these malefactors, it has brought His experience and even His bloodshed into touch with that of even common criminals, and has preserved to all time the blessed message that

grace and pity were extended by the Saviour's Own Lips to a penitent criminal. His Apostles and His followers would in any case have preached to all such sinners the forgiveness of sins, but nothing could have brought that blessed message home to the greatest sinners so much as the fact that the Saviour shared the doom of criminals, and did not shrink from sympathy with them "in the same condemnation." From that moment, men have been assured, not merely by words and promises, but by the spectacle of the Cross itself and those three suffering figures, that, as it has been expressed by an old poet:

> "Down in the depths of mine iniquity
> There I behold this suffering God of mine.
> For in that spiritual death condemned lying
> To pains eternal by eternal doom,
> I see my Saviour for the same sins dying,
> And from that hell I feared, to save me come."

"They offered Him," we are told, "wine to drink mingled with myrrh." In our Authorised Version, one of the accounts speaks of vinegar mingled with gall, but the true text in that case also speaks of wine, and there can be no doubt that the meaning, in both accounts, is that they offered Him wine and myrrh as a drink to deaden the sense of pain, "but when He had tasted it He would not drink," or, as St. John says, "He received it not." He would not, it is evident, have His perceptions

clouded or weakened in this last struggle : He would face the whole bitterness of it, and be able to speak and act with undimmed consciousness. It was a further token of that Divine manliness of which I spoke previously, but it was of vital importance that the few precious words with which His life was closed should be uttered with this perfect mental clearness. Together with the words He spoke at His trial, they are the most momentous words that ever issued even from His lips. We must be sensible, in meditating on them, of our complete inability to apprehend all their significance, and the importance of weighing with the utmost care, every syllable of them.

The Lord being thus fixed on the Cross between the two malefactors, and having refused to allow His thoughts to be in the least degree clouded, He then utters the first of the Seven Words from the Cross, and it is a word which, uttered at that moment, is amazing in its grace. "Father, forgive them : for they know not what they do." To appreciate it in any degree we must recall at what a moment and in what circumstances the word was uttered. The Saviour had just gone through the final torment of being cruelly fastened to the Cross; the first agony of that dreadful suffering was upon Him, and the first word which escapes His lips is a prayer for the forgiveness of those who have inflicted it. It

is the same spirit which breathed in His lament over Jerusalem, and in His address to the women, "Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." It is the same absolute self-forgetfulness, the same complete absorption in the salvation of those whom He came to deliver. It is the utterance of a Saviour's heart and a Saviour's woe; but is it not a flash of grace from Heaven itself that words of such tenderness for those who had wronged Him should be the first to be uttered by Him at that agonising moment?

If we reverently consider them more particularly, there appears a peculiar tenderness in them. "Father," He says, with the simplicity of a child. It is His usual mode of addressing His Father in prayer. There are only two places in which He is recorded to have said "My Father," and those are His prayers at Gethsemane, when His soul is exceeding troubled and He is addressing His last despairing petition to His Father that if possible the cup might pass from Him. There He seems to add some stress and depth to the appeal by the words, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from Me." Twice in the High-Priestly prayer before His Passion He uses a word to indicate the character in which He specially appeals to His Father—appealing to Him as "O righteous Father" to fulfil His righteousness, and "Holy Father" when praying

that His disciples may be kept holy. But at all other times His address to His Father is the intimate language of a child, simply "Father." What a revelation of His faith in that Father, that He could use that simple and tender appellation at the moment when, at that Father's will, He was first experiencing the bitter sufferings of the Cross! His Father had not removed the cup from Him. It was at His Father's will, in consequence of His Father's decision that it could not be removed, that He was now drinking its bitterness; but, notwithstanding that, notwithstanding the bitter fact that He was enduring by His Father's will all the cruelty of His agonising death, His lips breathe in perfect calmness the childlike word "Father." Ought not the utterance of that single, simple childlike word at such a time, even had He said nothing else, to be a message of infinite comfort and support to His fellow men and women in their own moments of trial and even agony? If He could use "Father" as His first word on the Cross, ought we to be unable to say it, whatever our own trouble and suffering? And if we can say it, surely the bitterness of all such trouble is past.

But He proceeds to the prayer, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." His supreme concern is for the forgiveness of those at whose hands He is suffering, and He founds the

prayer on the plea that they know not what they do. We must needs ask, Whom does He mean by "them"? It is a question which has given occasion for much difference of opinion. Some have thought that those whom He immediately had in view were the soldiers and other officers who were the mere instruments of others in inflicting this punishment on Him, who were not Jews, and not only did not know, but could not understand Who He claimed to be, and what were the great issues of truth and righteousness involved. One modern writer, who has had much influence, the author of *Ecce Homo*, went so far as to say that these were the only persons for whose forgiveness the Saviour prayed, but that it does not appear that He ever forgave the Jewish authorities whose malice and bitterness had brought Him to the Cross. But there is one testimony on the subject which seems decisive against this view, and which we cannot doubt was inspired by the Saviour's own Spirit. St. Peter, in one of His early addresses after the Day of Pentecost, said to the people, after denouncing their crime in denying the Holy One and the Just and desiring a murderer to be granted unto them, and killing the Prince of Life, proceeds, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." It is the most merciful interpretation of the acts of the Jewish authorities that can be conceived,

but we cannot doubt that the voice of the Apostle, fresh from those forty days' converse with the risen Saviour, and speaking under the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is expressing the Saviour's own merciful judgment on the men who rejected and crucified Him.

"They knew not what they did." They might indeed have known; they ought to have known it. Their nation had been trained over eighteen centuries by prophets and by wonders and signs, that they might know it; but when the crisis came, they had not learned the lesson, and for want of so knowing it they committed this fatal crime. And yet, notwithstanding, in spite of their refusal to hear the prophets and the Son Whom their Father sent unto them, the Saviour, through His Apostle, still puts this gracious construction upon their conduct, and says, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." Does not this consideration lead us into the very depth of the mercies of God and of the grace of the Saviour's heart; and may we not legitimately take comfort ourselves when we look upon our own sins, and know in our conscience that we could hardly dare to use the plea that we knew not what we were doing; and may we not hope that He graciously recognises that we did not know it all, that we did not know

as we ought to have known, what we were sinning against, and what the full temptation was to which we were yielding? And if we turn to Him in full penitence, we may trust that His merciful judgment may say to us, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it." "Father, forgive them."

But was His prayer answered? Were they forgiven? What became, then, of that judgment of which He warned the women who bewailed Him, when they would cry to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them? Did not that judgment fall upon them none the less? It did: but it must be remembered what occurred before it was inflicted. Was not St. Peter's very preaching to them an act of forgiveness? Was it not a real fulfilment of this prayer that St. Peter should have been authorised to say to the very men who a few weeks before had procured our Lord's crucifixion and gloated over it, "Now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers," and that those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets that Christ should suffer, had been so fulfilled? "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ (which before was preached unto you)," Who had been appointed for you. . . . "Unto you first, God,

having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." There, surely, is this gracious forgiveness for which the Saviour prayed, in full operation, and had the Jews accepted it they might still have been saved from the doom which befell them. But they rejected even this forgiveness, and then their doom fell. Let us take that warning to ourselves, as well as this encouragement. We may take to ourselves for our comfort that merciful construction which the Saviour put upon even the worst of sins, but only on condition that we turn it to the purpose for which the Saviour grants it, and remember that we must repent and turn from our sins if we would have them blotted out even by His unbounded mercy.

XVII

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do."—St. Luke xxiii. 34.

I would call your attention to another aspect of the first word of our Lord from the Cross, on which we were meditating yesterday, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." It deserves our consideration that He does not say, "I forgive them." Of course His personal forgiveness is implied in His request that His Father would forgive them, but it is expressly taught us that He is the Judge of quick and dead, and as He Himself said, "the Father had committed all judgment to the Son." The conclusion and summary of St. Peter's message to Cornelius is that "He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He Who is ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." In this momentous word, however, our Lord implies that the final judgment and the fate of those who

had crucified Him rested with God the Father, as if the ultimate sentence did not lie with Himself. To help us to appreciate the fact thus indicated, we must, in the first place, clearly distinguish between personal forgiveness and remission of the consequences of sin. Our Lord's prayer implies His absolute personal forgiveness, and that, even if it had no other consequences, would be an act of infinite grace ; but it in no way follows from personal forgiveness, even by the Son of God Himself, that the consequences of sin can be remitted. It does not do so between ourselves. A father may feel the utmost personal forgiveness and even tenderness to a son who has wronged him and his family, and yet it may be impossible from the settled constitution of life and the circumstances of the family, that the son should escape all the consequences of his misdeeds ; and if this is the case even in family life, it is necessarily much more so in the general relations of life which are less modified by such personal considerations. Our Lord's prayer accordingly implies that, notwithstanding His personal forgiveness, those who had brought Him to the Cross—not only his executioners, but, as St. Peter's statements imply, the Jews and their Rulers—were liable to Divine judgment for the crime they had committed. In point of fact, our Lord's own rejection and crucifixion was itself the most fearful

exhibition of the operation of that Divine judgment. It was not merely an outburst of hatred and jealousy roused by our Lord's claims to authority which led to that crime. The crime itself was the natural consequence, and therefore the natural judgment, which was entailed by the laws of God, by the constitution of human nature, upon a long course of moral corruption, and the indulgence of those spiritual vices which our Lord denounced so solemnly on the Pharisees. That is to a large extent the way in which God's judgments operate. There is a terrible verse in one Psalm, "Let them fall from one wickedness to another." That is the worst consequence of sin, and we are so constituted that except by the special interposition of God's Spirit, it is inevitable.

It is this which constitutes, to a large extent at least, the expiation of our Lord's death. Among the various theories in which men have endeavoured to explain and to realise the meaning of the atonement, it used to be said that our Lord had endured the full punishment of all human sin, and for that reason the punishment was not to be exacted from mankind. There is an important sense in which that representation is quite true. The natural consequence of human sin if left to itself would be that men would "fall from one wickedness to another," and never come into God's righteousness, that they would cast out all truth and righteousness from

human society. That is what the great philosopher of Greece foresaw would be the case, when, in perhaps the most memorable passage of all pre-Christian literature, he predicted that if a perfectly just man appeared in the world men would revolt against him, would treat him as if he were perfectly unjust, and would destroy him by a cruel death. That is exactly what was realised in the crucifixion of our Lord. Being perfect Truth, Justice, and Righteousness, He was treated as if He were untrue, unjust, and unrighteous, and was cast out of the world by crucifixion. That is to say, that the natural judgment of God's laws on human sin was actually realised to the full by the crucifixion of our Lord; and it has thus been demonstrated before the whole world, and even before the whole universe, that according to the laws of God, according to the constitution of the world, the judgment of His laws on human sin is that it involves the absolute ruin of mankind, their death in the most comprehensive sense—the death of their souls, and the consequent ruin of human life, ending in physical as well as moral destruction. But instead of leaving men to suffer this fearful deluge of ruin, our Lord Himself suffered it, and the full consequences of accumulated human evil broke upon His Head. We must realise that He was truth and righteousness incarnate in order to appreciate the tremendous

import thus involved in His death. We must realise in the Cross all the forces of sin and evil concentrated against the incarnation of all the forces of justice, righteousness, truth, and love. We must contemplate our Lord bearing, not by any arbitrary arrangement, but as a matter of fact, all that human nature must have borne if left to itself, all that it was in point of fact on the very eve of suffering in the utter corruption of the ancient world, had not our Saviour interposed, in St. Paul's words, "Bearing our sins in His own Body on the tree," and we may then appreciate to some extent at once the terrible force of the Divine justice and the immeasurable interposition offered by our Lord to its consequences.

But all this is what lies behind our Saviour's prayer to His Father that His enemies might be forgiven. He realised, as no one else could, the terrible storms of spiritual and moral retribution which must needs, under the constitution of human nature, break sooner or later upon those who had fallen into this depth of sin. He saw that in the natural consequence of things the will of His Father must enforce these dreadful consequences, and that the curse which had to be endured was not that of any personal resentment from Himself, but that of the natural laws of Divine righteousness and goodness. It is in view of this terrible judgment that He offers this touching and gracious prayer to His

Father, appeals on the ground of His Own suffering, at the very moment of its consummation, that His Father would forgive them, for they knew not what they did.

Who, indeed, but He did know? According to another inspired writer, even the Angels desire to look into these mysteries. There was no one in that assembly of Jewish Doctors, no one of course in the crowd, no one of course, still less, among those into whose hands He was delivered, who knew what was really happening. No one, we may surely say, even among the Apostles, before the Spirit was come to them, knew what were the heights and depths of that tremendous tragedy. No one can realise what are the heights and depths of Divine judgments, what are the tremendous issues of moral realities unless he sees them in the death of Christ, unless he sees them actually working out their fearful consequences in that Crucifixion. Though our Saviour is appointed Judge of quick and dead, it is His office to execute judgment in accordance with the will of His Father "that God may be all in all." It is the will of His Father, and the justice of His Father, that He is charged to execute, and consequently if the operation of those laws is to be stayed it must be by some atoning influence on His Father's will. That atoning influence our Lord exerts in this prayer, and thus obtains from

His Father a stay of that judgment which otherwise must have unavoidably fallen upon His enemies.

There is, therefore, this supreme intensity in our Lord's first word from the Cross, that it exhibits to us for our instruction and our comfort our Lord's action as a Mediator. Here is the one visible example of that perpetual intercession which He exerts on our behalf at this moment, which He has exerted ever since His Crucifixion, and which in anticipation of that atonement He has exerted ever since the beginning of the world. The spectacle exactly corresponds with the description of His work given in the Epistles. So St. John says, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous: and He is the Propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." It is most impressive and instructive to remember in reading such passages in the Epistles that they are not, as I fear people are somewhat too apt to consider them, the statements and arguments of theologians looking back upon long-past events, but they are the simple statements of the convictions of our Lord's Own contemporaries and companions, based upon what they had themselves heard and seen. "That," says St. John, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our

hands have handled, of the Word of Life. . . . That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." St. John, who wrote the words just quoted, had stood at the foot of the Cross on which his beloved Master had died. As is shown by various incidents in these narratives, he was specially observant of some of the details of the Crucifixion. Perhaps he was nearer to the Cross than the other Apostles, as may be indicated by our Lord's subsequent words addressed to him and to the Blessed Virgin. Perhaps the special personal intensity of his affection for our Lord rendered his attention to these details more acute. It is he alone who gives us the details of the parting of our Saviour's garments and of the casting lots upon His vesture. It may, I think, be felt that there is something peculiarly touching in the beloved disciple thus remembering so minutely, and recording, what was done with the relics of his Master's earthly garments. It is specially in his mind that the treatment of those sad relics recalls that Psalm of deep prophetic vision, which said, "They parted My garments among them, and for My vesture did they cast lots," and he thus realised that the Scripture was once more fulfilled. It is he who thus saw Him "brought like a lamb to the slaughter," who specially realises Him in the character of "The Lamb of God." It is he again who gives us the

details of that title which he himself saw hanging above our Saviour's head on the Cross; and who, perhaps from his intimacy with the High Priest's family, was able to tell us of that profoundly significant incident of the petition of the High Priest that the title should be altered, and of Pilate's stern refusal, "What I have written, I have written"; so that our Lord died with His true designation as the King of the Jews inscribed above His head. These incidents we recall for the purpose of bringing home the fact that St. John was an eye-witness of every detail of these circumstances, and himself heard these sacred words, and when he tells us that "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous," he is inspired by his remembrance of the Saviour's Own words when he heard Him plead as an Advocate with the Father, and felt that He was claiming to be the Propitiation for the greatest sin ever committed in the world. It is with that experience burned into his very soul, that he assures us that "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous: and He is the Propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." It is not doctrinal theology, but personal experience which inspires that declaration of the beloved disciple.

One other such personal reminiscence ought

to be recalled in this connection. St. Peter also, though after his fall it may well be in less close association, must have witnessed these scenes, and the words of his First Epistle acquire a peculiar force and tenderness when we remember that in referring to the death of our Lord, he, too, is speaking of things that he had heard and seen, and of events, over his own part in which he had wept bitterly. Read in the light of that vision present to the mind of the Apostle who wrote them, the touching words, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: Who His Own Self bare our sins in His Own Body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by Whose stripes [the very stripes which St. Peter must have seen with such remorse] ye were healed." There are few better helps to our faith than to allow these Apostles to take us by the hand, back to the foot of the Cross, to stand there with them and hear through their words, as it were, with our own ears the utterances of the dying Saviour, and enter with them into their meaning. The atonement is certainly one of the great

mysteries of the Gospel and of the world. It involves the height and length and breadth of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. But if we are ever perplexed by the confusion of controversies about it, if we ever wonder in our moments of remorse and distress how to grasp its comfort, let us simply listen with St. John to the Saviour's first word, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do," and let us listen to the Apostle echoing it in the assurance, "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and He is the Propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world."

XVIII

THE KING OF THE JEWS

"Pilate wrote a title and put it on the Cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS."—St. John xix. 19.

The circumstance narrated in these verses is one of the most remarkable and instructive in the story of the Passion. It was the custom in Roman times that a person sentenced to suffer death should carry with him to the place of his execution a tablet stating the nature of the offence of which he was judged guilty. Each of the four Evangelists mentions that this custom was followed in the case of our Lord, and, in substance, they give the same account of the statement on the tablet. St. Matthew says that "they set up over His head His accusation written, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." St. Mark says, "the superscription of His accusation"—that is to say, the offence of which He was accused—"was written over, The King of the Jews." St. Luke says, "a superscription was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, This is the King of the Jews." The variations in the actual words reported afford a conspicuous illustration of the manner in which the inspiration of the Evangelists was directed to

the substance of what they recorded independently of exact verbal accuracy. As in the case of the Temptation and of the Institution of the Lord's Supper, so here they give in slightly varying words the main substance of what was done or said.

But it is again remarkable that, as in the account of the parting of our Saviour's garments, the details are given with the greatest completeness by St. John. It is evident that the beloved disciple who, as is afterwards mentioned, stood by the Cross of Jesus with His Mother and His Mother's sister, and Mary Magdalene, was in a position to observe with all the intense insight of loving devotion all the particular circumstances of the Passion. It is from him we learn that it was Pilate who wrote the title and ordered it to be put upon the Cross, and he gives us in full the title of the inscription which the other Evangelists summarise, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." It will be remembered that St. John, as he himself says, was known unto the High Priest, and, therefore, had special means of becoming acquainted with the proceedings of the Chief Priests. It is from him, accordingly, that we also learn that the title thus composed by Pilate gave great offence to the Chief Priests, and that they endeavoured to induce Pilate to alter it. They said to Pilate, obviously before it was fixed on the Cross, "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that He said,

I am the King of the Jews." But Pilate answered them curtly, "What I have written I have written." Consequently throughout the time that our Lord hung upon the Cross the title was conspicuously visible over His Head, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." It was written so as to be legible to all who passed by, and it was written in the three languages of which one at least would be intelligible to every one. The Hebrew or Aramaic form would be intelligible to the Jews of Palestine; the Greek would be intelligible to the Jews of the dispersion who were at Jerusalem for the Passover; and the Latin would be intelligible to the Roman officials and to many others. The three languages practically covered, in fact, the whole world of that day—the Greek to the educated classes throughout the Roman Empire, the Latin to the Governing classes and to the army. In combination the three inscriptions spoke to the whole world and proclaimed that the Sufferer over whose head it was placed was King of the Jews, and had been sentenced to death in that capacity.

Now there can be no question that in this brief and epigrammatic form, Pilate had expressed the main point of the hostility of the Jewish rulers to our Saviour. They had resorted in the course of His trial to various charges, such as blasphemy, but the head and front of His offending was that

He had claimed the authority of the true King of the Jews—the true Messias. He had entered Jerusalem as a King, riding in royal state, and had accepted the homage of the multitude in that character. "All this was done," says St. Matthew, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass." "And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" and when the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" the multitude answered, "This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." Moreover, it is evident that that was the first and last charge urged before Pilate. At Pilate's first interview with our Lord, the Governor asked Him saying, "Art Thou the King of the Jews?" and Jesus answered him, "Thou sayest," or in Jewish idiom, "I am": and when all other charges failed, the Jews fell back upon this, crying out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." Pilate finally said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" "The Chief Priests answered, We have no King but Cæsar. Then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified."

It is evident, in short, that Pilate recognised that although with some circumstances of mystery which he did not understand, our Lord was a King, and the King of the Jews, though He asserted that dignity and office in a spiritual sense which in no way conflicted with the allegiance due to Cæsar. In spite of his conviction of this truth, Pilate was forced by the taunt, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend," to give Him up to be crucified, but he reasserted this conviction of his conscience in his formal description of the title of our Lord's offence. Possibly, as has been suggested, he was publicly justifying his action by making this charge so conspicuous, and thus declaring before the world that our Lord had been sentenced to death for rebellion against Roman authority. But though he may have had this double motive, it seems clear, especially from his answer to the Chief Priests, that he was asserting what he believed to be the truth respecting our Lord, namely, that He was really the King of the Jews, and that, as is said in one place, the Chief Priests had delivered Him for envy. That this was the main fact brought out at the trial is further illustrated by the brutal action of the soldiery, who upon our Lord's condemnation at once proceeded to mock Him as King of the Jews, and to insult Him as the pretended King of the despised race. All

things, in short, point to the fact that Pilate had been led by a true instinct to recognise that the claim to be the King of the Jews was the head and front of our Lord's offence; and so to sum up the whole of His claim, and the whole cause of His being condemned to the Cross, in the simple statement that He was "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

The result was that in the face of the world and of all time, the solemn proclamation is made that our Lord suffered death upon the Cross as "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." He is lifted up there in His agony and death in that character, and the cause of His suffering is declared alike to the Jews and to ourselves, in that simple statement. It certainly sums up the whole history of His ministry from first to last, and it is infinitely instructive to consider it in that light. His first words were the proclamation, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." He went through the cities and villages preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom; He proceeded to declare and to explain the laws of that Kingdom, its powers and its graces; and He both acted and spoke throughout as its King. It was indeed a delegated authority which He claimed. The Kingdom was the Kingdom of God, and it was as God's Son—as the Divine Messiah or Christ—that He acted. He always spoke in the sense of that

saying of St. Paul that the end would come when He would deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, that God might be all in all. But He proclaimed the establishment of a new authority, of a new realm of spiritual and moral life, and from this proclamation He came from the first into conflict with the Jewish Chiefs and Rulers. To them, the Law of Moses which they administered was the final authority in the world, and that a Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee should claim to be superior to it, to give it a new interpretation, and practically to supersede them in the explanation and enforcement of it, appeared to them a blasphemous usurpation. But they might have listened to Him (as St. Paul afterwards did, though as earnest as themselves in his devotion to the Law) if, like St. Paul, they had been single-minded and free from personal prejudice: but they felt that their own power and position were at stake, and self-consciousness and envy blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. Our Lord was, indeed, as St. Paul afterwards realised, fulfilling the spirit of the ancient Law and accomplishing the very purpose for which it was given. The Sermon on the Mount is based on the Law, and does but enlarge its application and reveal new spiritual powers for obeying it. The Kingdom which our Lord founded and revealed, and which is partly realised in His Church, has in fact taken up into

its system the whole experience of the Jewish people, and all that was essential in their institutions and laws; but the Priests and Scribes could not believe this, and they consequently condemned themselves to exclusion from our Lord's Kingdom. That is the conflict which still subsists between the Jewish faith and the Christian. They will not realise that Our Lord is their King, and that consequently the Law to which they are so jealously devoted must be administered by Him, and in accordance with His authority. It was necessarily a mortal conflict. The two authorities could not exist side by side, and the Jews were driven by the insistence of their own self-assertion to cast out and destroy, so far as they could, the King they rejected. They did not know that He was a Spiritual King, and that He would rise with new authority from the grave.

It would be well for us if we had this Inscription more continually before our own minds in our daily lives, and in the public struggles of our time. We need for our invigoration in the ordinary temptations of life to have it constantly present to our minds that Christ is not only our Saviour, but our King. We acknowledge it in the customary expression "Our Lord," but the homage is too often and in too great a degree a verbal one, and it would strengthen us to realise more constantly that we are living in His Kingdom, under His

Laws; that our supreme duty at every moment is to be loyal to Him as our Sovereign. In public life also it is, I fear, becoming more and more the question of questions whether all the great offices and institutions of our national life are to be maintained under the authority of Christ, and governed primarily by regard for His authority. In the enactment of our laws on social matters, such as marriage, in the education of our children, shall we continue to recognise, as our fathers did, that the supreme duty which is incumbent on us is to act in obedience to the laws of Christ's Kingdom, to maintain allegiance to Him, and never to allow His Name, His authority, and His Will to be relegated to a second place? The life and the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, Who died upon the Cross, must be maintained openly and unswervingly as the supreme law of public as well as of private life, if we are to be loyal to the claim which He consecrated with His Blood, and under which alone we can live in harmony with the Will of God.

One other consideration must be added if we are to appreciate the full consequence of this inscription on the Saviour's Cross. To many who looked at that Cross, and to some who think of it now, it seems a degradation for One Who claimed to be the King of Israel to be suffering such a death; but to us who know the real cause and meaning of that death the spectacle has a precisely

contrary character, and we regard that Cross as the most glorious of all the experiences of our Lord. Why was He hanging on that Cross? Because as the King of the Kingdom of Heaven, He was the leader in the conflict by which it was established, and as a true King, He is foremost in the battle and the conflict. Our Lord did not leave His followers, the Apostles and the Martyrs, to bear the strain and to make the sacrifices which were necessary before the Kingdom of God could gain its victory over the world. He was first in the fight Himself, and He bore more and suffered more than any of His followers. He showed, moreover, in His own example, the way in which the battle was to be conducted and won—by patience, humility, and self-sacrifice. He was never more truly a King than when setting that example to all His followers of the patient sacrifice by which alone the victory of the Kingdom of Heaven could be won. The inscription was never more true than at that moment, that Jesus of Nazareth was the King of the Jews and the King of all men.

XIX

THE REVILINGS AT THE CROSS

"And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads,
"And saying, Thou that destroyest the Temple and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross.
"Likewise also the Chief Priests mocking Him, with the Scribes and Elders, said,
"He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him.
"He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God."

ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 39–43.

I THINK it may well be said that the scene described in these verses is the most disgraceful in the records of human nature. The malice, the selfish passion, the injustice of the Jewish Rulers, and the cowardice of Pilate are bad enough, but similar vices, though not in so high a degree, have been exhibited elsewhere. But when a sufferer has been condemned to punishment justly or unjustly, the common instinct of humanity has always moved men to treat his sufferings as a sufficient atonement for his offence, and to regard them with sorrow and pity. It has been unheard of that they should aggravate his misery by insults and taunts. The case is made worse here by the fact that those who inflicted the

insults on our Saviour are not the vulgar members of a passionate mob, but the highest authorities of the Jews themselves, men who had been our Saviour's judges, whom the instinct of common decency ought to have restrained from treating with insult the offender, whom, as they would have alleged, they had been compelled by considerations of severe justice to condemn. We are told of the Chief Priests also mocking Him with the Scribes and Elders. There could not be a more dreadful proof of the ungovernable malice and hatred by which the Rulers and Jews had been animated in all their dealings with our Lord, and it is perhaps the most distressing evidence afforded of the Satanic malice of which the human heart is capable. It suggests fearful reflections that human nature should have exhibited this intensity of wickedness in a people who, for nearly two thousand years, had been under the special care and guidance of God, and whose Prophets and Psalmists had proclaimed the noblest ideals of justice and mercy. What a degradation for a people who had been taught by one of themselves, "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God!" What it shows is that unless some new influence had been introduced into the world, the corruption of human nature was complete and irremediable.

What human nature could come to apart from such Divine guidance was at this same period being exhibited in a striking form in the characters and conduct of the Emperors of Rome. There were some noble exceptions, and several of them exhibited very high qualities, but the vice, violence, and cruelty which they exhibited without shame in the face of the world form a horrible record. The Roman Empire, accordingly, in spite of the efforts of its best men, fell into ever deeper corruption and ruin, and its decline and fall cannot but be regarded as the judgment of God upon a corrupt and hopeless society.

In some respects the Jews inherited traditions and beliefs which might have been the salt of the earth; but the fearful spectacle we are now considering, shows that they too, in spite of all that God had done for them, had become steeped in selfish pride and hardness of heart, and that no regenerating influence could be hoped for from them. It has thus been proved by a bitter experience and by the results of thousands of years, that human nature, without some higher influence than the world had yet known, would reproduce the disastrous results of the first age of the world's history. We read in the Book of Genesis that "the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And

God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt: for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth."

Then began a new dispensation, the dispensation of the Law, and the appointment of a chosen people who should be gradually trained to be a blessing to all others. But that dispensation had also failed. The leaders of the chosen people themselves were filled with violence and had corrupted their way, and the fullness of the time was come when both the Jewish and the old heathen world were finally judged and condemned, and a new dispensation, that of the Kingdom of God, would be established, which would gather up into itself all that had been good in the past, all the experience and the teaching of the life and history of Israel, all the truth and virtue which the Divine Wisdom had put into the hearts of Greece and Rome, and weld them together in a new Kingdom under the influence of the Spirit of God vouchsafed in a larger measure than ever before: but this could not be until atonement had been made for the sins of the past by our Lord's Sacrifice, Who at this time of the Divine regeneration of the world, was "set forth," as St. Paul says, "to be a Propitiation through faith in His Blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Here in this terrible scene we

see the actual enacting, the very culminating moment, of this marvellous dispensation. Here in the vile passions of the Jewish Rulers, Priests, and Scribes, following on the violation of justice by a Roman Governor, you see in one vivid picture the corruption of the dying world, and in our Saviour's sufferings you see the shedding of the Blood which was the propitiation for all those past crimes; while in the patient endurance of them "for the joy that was set before Him," you see the promise of the new life which He was about to bestow upon the world in His new Kingdom—the power of evil, the work of propitiation, faith and hope and love and salvation are here concentrated at their highest point, and are recorded by Divine inspiration for the eternal deliverance of mankind.

In the taunts and insults themselves there is a strange concentration of meaning. The first is, "Ah, Thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself and come down from the Cross." This, it will be remembered, was the final charge brought against our Lord by the High Priests. They sought false witness against Him, but found none. At the last came two false witnesses and said, "This fellow said, I will destroy this Temple which is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands." This was, of course, a

perversion of the mysterious sign which our Lord gave to the Jews at the outset of His ministry, after His first cleansing of the Temple, when the Jews said unto Him, "What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up. . . . But He spake of the Temple of His Body. When therefore," says St. John, "He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said." Had there been any real wish among the Jews to understand Him, they would have realised that He was speaking in parable, as His disciples did: but it was a piece of ingenious malice to pervert the saying to mean a declaration that He would Himself destroy the Temple. It was upon that very charge that His first martyr, St. Stephen, was arraigned. "We have heard him say," said his accusers, "that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered us." It was on a charge of profaning the Temple that St. Paul was seized, and held in captivity by the Romans. The difficulty and the malice of the taunt in all three cases is that it was the perversion of a truth. The establishment of the Kingdom of God by our Lord would necessarily involve, as St. Stephen

argued, the supersession of the old ritual, and with it, of the Temple as the only place of God's Presence. "Howbeit," as he concluded, "the Most High dwelleth not in Temples made with hands; as saith the prophet. Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest?" The time would come, as our Lord said to the Samaritan woman, "when neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what. We know what we worship. For salvation is of the Jews. God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

The revelation of that Spirit and of that spiritual worship was the very purpose of the revelation of the Kingdom of God, and therefore there was a sense in which it was true that our Lord would destroy the Temple; but the Jews attended only to that part of His saying, they did not listen to the second part, nor try to understand it. "And in three days I will raise it up." He was going to supersede it by a greater, a nobler, and an eternal Temple, the Temple of His Body, His risen Body, in Which the Living God would be for ever incarnate, which would itself be the real sacrifice, of which the Jewish sacrifices had been shadows, and in which

everything which the Temple and its ritual signified would be established in its eternal reality. Had they been capable of believing that He would thus raise up a nobler Temple, the realisation of all that they prized and honoured, the Jews would have had no reason to regret the disappearance of the material one, but it was their curse that they could not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart that spiritual world of which our Saviour spoke. To the last they could see nothing but external forms and ceremonies, and they therefore raged against our Lord, against St. Stephen, and against St. Paul, as the destroyers of the one Divine thing they thought they possessed.

It was an amazing blindness, but even this is surpassed by the hardness of heart exhibited in the taunt which followed. That taunt is naturally reported in two or three different forms, as it was probably expressed differently by those who uttered it. But its substance seems to be most fully given by St. Matthew. "The Chief Priests, mocking Him, with the Scribes and Elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God." The astonishing thing is that they are quoting from the great Psalm of the Passion

(the 22nd) where the words are, "All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him." But by what extraordinary hardness of heart was it that, when quoting from that Psalm, they did not realise that these words are the inspired utterance of a Man who speaks as the suffering Servant of God, enduring even to minute detail the very agonies they were witnessing in our Saviour, and who, in spite of those agonies and that reproach, is described as retaining the love and help of God, and as ultimately delivered by Him. The Psalm was, taken generally, a witness to every Jew, and above all, one would have thought, to Scribes and Elders, that a man might suffer the extremity of torture and apparent desertion, he might be driven to cry out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and might yet be the beloved of God.

The history of their nation might, one would have thought, have taught them that a people chosen of God and beloved of Him, might be allowed by Him to suffer the utmost misery and degradation, and yet remain His chosen seed and be ultimately delivered. But they did not remember how that Psalm ended with an outburst of thanksgiving, "I will declare Thy Name

unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. Ye that fear the Lord, praise the Lord; all ye seed of Jacob, glorify Him; and fear Him, all ye seed of Israel. For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard him." For a Jew—a Priest, a Scribe or an Elder—to be taunting a sufferer with his agonies and apparent helplessness as signs that he was forsaken by God, was to be false to the deepest lessons of his own history, and to reject the deepest teaching of his own Psalmists and Prophets. Above all, that such taunts should be taken from a Psalm which is the most forcible assertion in all the Scriptures of the Old Testament of the privilege of maintaining absolute faith in God in the deepest sorrow and affliction and apparent defeat, can only be explained by the saying which Our Lord and St. Paul quote again and again from Isaiah, "He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and convert and be healed."

It is a great mystery. It was the correspondence of Psalms like this with the actual suffering of our Lord which convinced St. Paul and the Apostles that our Lord was Christ, the Messiah, to Whom the prophecies of their

fathers had pointed. They were not less blind in the taunt, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." He could not save Himself from the sufferings of the Cross, for they were the propitiation which He was offering for the sins of the whole world; but when that propitiation had been offered, He did save Himself, by the power of God, from what they thought a deeper doom still, even from the grave. Without that resurrection, these taunts might have seemed to be justified, but that victory revealed their futility, and has for ever vindicated the Divine virtue of this Sacrifice.

XX

THE PENITENT MALEFACTOR

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.

"But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

"And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss.

"And he said unto Him, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.

"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." ST. LUKE xxiii. 39–43.

IT is a relief to turn from the almost unrelieved darkness of the scene we considered yesterday to an incident in the story of the Passion which is illuminated by the most gracious light of Heaven and of grace. It commences, indeed, as part of the same grievous experience. The malefactors who were crucified with Jesus joined in the reproaches which were cast upon Him by the Priests and Scribes. We are told it was one of the horrible consequences frequently attendant on the punishment of crucifixion, that the victims in their prolonged agony cast reproaches and maledictions on the spectators around them. But in this instance the abominable example of the Jewish Priests and Elders must have naturally incited

them to such reproaches. When they heard those elders of the people taunting our Lord with having claimed to be the Christ and Son of God, and as having power to rebuild the Temple in three days, it was but natural that in their despair they should call upon Him, if He were the Christ, to save them. There is, however, one singular divergence in the three narratives. The first two Evangelists say that the thieves or robbers that were crucified with Him reproached Him, as though both of them had done so; whereas St. Luke, in the passage in the text, says that one of them "railed on Him, saying, If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us; but the other answering rebuked him." There are two explanations of the divergence. One which, on the whole, seems to me the more probable, that the first two Evangelists are only speaking generally of the fact that reproaches were addressed to our Lord from a malefactor, so that in the taunts thrown on Him, voices from the crosses mingled with those of the passers by; and as it was not their purpose to record the action of the penitent robber, they did not stop to distinguish that cry more particularly. The other explanation, which was very anciently adopted in the Church, is that both malefactors did originally join in the reproaches, but that one of them was impressed by our Lord's words, and by His infinite patience and goodness, and became converted to belief in Him during his

sufferings. That may have been the case; there is no improbability in it, but at the same time, the reason which the malefactor gives for his conversion, that our Lord, as distinct from himself and his companion, had "done nothing amiss," points to his having formed a judgment of our Lord's character from what he knew of His life and acts; and if he came to the cross with that conviction, he would hardly have joined, even for a moment, in the shameful reproaches which he heard.

But, however that may be, we have only to consider the penitent malefactor's confession and our Lord's gracious answer. Rebuking his companion on the cross, he said, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds." The emphasis of the rebuke is in the word "fear." As he had been brought into this terrible condition by his past misdeeds, did he not fear to aggravate them by this malediction and injustice? We indeed, it is added, are under that condemnation justly for we receive the due reward of our deeds. That is the confession of a man convinced of his own guilt, and willing to bear the punishment which was the only expiation he could make for them. It may well be that this humble penitence had been awakened or deepened in his mind by the contrast,

of which he was made sensible by our Lord's presence, between guilt like his own and perfect innocence. To a man at all prepared for this penitent spirit, the words and the acts of our Lord at His Crucifixion must have been profoundly touching. The Saviour's first words, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do," must have penetrated his heart with their marvellous revelation of our Saviour's grace, and must have brought home to him, at the same time, the possibility of mercy and forgiveness for even a sinner like himself. Perhaps, too, he may have felt that his crimes had been in a great measure committed, not knowing what he did, and a new hope may thus have been awakened in his heart. Then, as he witnessed our Saviour's majestic silence and patience in His torments, and amidst the cruel insults that were inflicted on Him, the sense which he expresses in simple words, "This Man hath done nothing amiss," must have grown deeper and more moving in his mind. The prophetic words of Isaiah were fulfilled to the letter and beyond it: "He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." It must be borne in mind that the malefactor had doubtless been brought with our Lord to Calvary, and that the inscription over our Lord's Cross, and the moving incidents

of His journey through Jerusalem, had all been witnessed by him; and when these were concluded by our Lord's words and patience on the Cross, the malefactor's conviction of His innocence was completely established in his heart. But in proportion as he was thus convinced of our Lord's perfect innocence—that He had done nothing amiss—the conviction must also have deepened in him that our Lord's claim was true, that He was the Son of God, the Christ and the King of Israel. He can realise that in refusing to save either Himself or His companions from the cross, He was still doing nothing amiss, that His patience was deliberate and was due to some great purpose. The consequence is that his faith in our Lord rises above all the terrible and inconsistent circumstances of the scene. Notwithstanding all the cries and the agonies and the insults, and the apparent helplessness of the Sufferer, for Himself and others, he can believe that He is the God and the King which His title proclaimed, and he surrenders his soul to Him absolutely.

This is certainly the most extraordinary instance of occurrences which are very characteristic of the Gospels, the sudden surrender of men to the claims of Christ. We see it in the case of the calls of the Apostles, in the story and sudden conversion of Nathanael, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." Some sceptical

critics have dwelt on such incidents as illustrating a hastiness and lack of due thought in those who thus obeyed our Saviour at a word, but that is a hasty and unworthy judgment. If a man surrenders at a word, the question is, at what sort of word? What all these incidents illustrate is the fact that in the Person and in the tones of our Lord there was, when it pleased Him, a majesty, an authority, and a grace which could not but at once subdue the human heart before it. He did not exert this influence always. He reserved it for the men and the occasions on which it was needed and appropriate. He could exert it on His enemies, as He did in the Garden when He was seized by the soldiers, when He said unto them, "I am He," and they "went backward and fell to the ground." It was so again at St. Paul's conversion. The few words which the Saviour spoke to him on the road to Damascus were sufficient to transform his whole life and to revolutionise his deepest convictions. All these instances of strong men, in the most various circumstances, thus subdued by a touch of the Saviour's hand or voice, are striking illustrations of St. John's account of Him. "We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This is the influence which seems to have won the whole heart of the malefactor on the cross, and doubtless, if ever that grace and truth

of the Lord was manifested in its highest degree, it must have been to those who were privileged to look with understanding eyes and heart on His bearing, and to hear His words, on the Cross. I think we have an echo of it in the profound feeling which breathes in St. Peter's words in his First Epistle, when referring to the Crucifixion, where he speaks of "the precious blood of Christ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot," or still more when he mentions how "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: Who His Own self bare our sins in His Own Body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by Whose stripes ye were healed." Every reference to our Lord in that Epistle bears the mark of proceeding from one who described himself as "a witness of the sufferings of Christ." Such were the kind of influences which wrought this surrender and conversion of heart in the mind of the malefactor. We may be surprised that they should not have touched others also; and many, perhaps, who are here mentioned, may have been similarly affected, and the spectacle of the Cross may have been one of the means by which the first disciples

were led to join the Church after the Resurrection. But there is no more sad and warning lesson to be drawn from these narratives, as from the whole story of our Lord's life on earth, than that it is possible for men by persistent sin to so blind their eyes and harden their hearts, that no influence, not even that of the Saviour on the Cross, can touch or move them.

In this penitence and faith, the malefactor proceeds to utter, what has been called by a great commentator the most exquisite of prayers, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." "Lord, remember me," that is enough. I cannot refrain in passing from protesting against one of the disfigurements of the Revised Version—one of those blemishes which, in spite of its other merits, render its adoption so difficult—that the words attributed to the malefactor are "Jesus, remember me." It has been justly said that there is no instance whatever in the whole of St. Luke's Gospel of any one addressing our Lord with the use of His personal Name without some accompanying term of reverence. If the word "Lord," which is employed in our Anglican version, is omitted from the text, there is still no reason for the revised translation. The word "Jesus" may be in the dative case, not a vocative, and the proper translation would be, "He said to Jesus, Remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." I note

the point the rather because there is a tendency in some quarters now to use the personal Name "Jesus" with something of the same familiarity, not only in hymns and devotions, but in other writings, and this is quite inconsistent with the practice of the writers of the New Testament. If any one might without impropriety have spoken to our Lord in that purely human tone, it was those who had been His companions upon earth; but you would find that the instances are very rare in which the word "Jesus" is used by them without some accompanying phrase, as "Lord" or "Christ." But it is the substance of the petition which gives it that exquisite character of which I have spoken. There is no definite gift or blessing asked for. The petitionary leaves all in the hands of Christ. It is enough for him that the Lord will remember him when He comes into His Kingdom; provided he is in the Saviour's remembrance, he is perfectly at rest. That is a fitting tone of mind for any one, but especially for a man conscious of his sins, like this penitent. He feels it is not for him to ask for any specific favour; he desires only to be remembered by his Lord and Saviour, knowing that he is in the hands of perfect love and mercy.

But the Saviour, as is His wont, gives him more than he desired or deserved. He said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with

Me in Paradise." Much discussion has been raised as to what was intended by Paradise, or would have been understood by the malefactor under that term. It is surely enough to say that Paradise would consist in being with the Saviour. It would have made all the difference in the world if our Lord had said, "To-day shalt thou be in Paradise." It would have been simply a vague promise of peace and happiness; but when the Saviour said, "Thou shalt be with Me," all that was necessary respecting Paradise had been said. It is remarkable that this is all that has been vouchsafed to our Lord's disciples by the Saviour respecting the future. When leaving the disciples He said to them, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." That is the one certainty which is revealed to Christians respecting their future home in Heaven. They will be where Christ is, and that is more than sufficient. What privilege and assurance can be so great as to know that when we pass from this world, if we pass from it in the faith and love of Christ, we shall pass into His presence and shall be with Him where He is? Such is the blessed gleam of grace and glory which in this incident illuminates the gloom of the Crucifixion.

As the three incidents we have contemplated at this time have brought before us all the wickedness of human nature and its fearful consequences, so this incident of the confession and prayer of the malefactor brings before us the full glory and grace of the Gospel, and gives us a pledge of the redemption which the Saviour was working out by His sufferings. Let us pray that we, too, may be granted the privilege of being with Him, with all the other penitent sinners whom He is gathering round Him.

XXI

THE BLESSED VIRGIN AT THE CROSS

"Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother, and His Mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

"When Jesus therefore saw His Mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His Mother, Woman, behold thy son!

"Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy Mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

St. John xix. 25–27.

In our meditations on the Passion of our Lord, last Holy Week, we considered our Saviour's gracious treatment of the penitent robber who was crucified with Him, and to-day we pass to what is perhaps the most touching circumstance in the whole grievous story—our Lord's brief words to His Mother, and to the disciple whom He loved. One of the most striking features in the whole narrative of our Saviour's condemnation and death is the interest and devotion exhibited towards Him by women. After His condemnation we read that "there followed Him a great company of people and of women, who also bewailed and lamented Him," and the saying He uttered on that bitter journey was addressed to the women, and was a word of sympathy and of warning, "Daughters

of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck." The deep sympathy with women's trials which breathes in those words must have been one of the influences which attached them to Him. Many of them followed Him to the Crucifixion itself and remained to witness it. "There were also," says St. Mark, "women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome (who also, when He was in Galilee, followed Him, and ministered unto Him), and many other women which came up with Him unto Jerusalem." It is an observation of an early Father that women showed themselves the stronger sex in firmness and devotion in this scene of shame and agony.

At the same time, it is to be remembered that when all the disciples forsook Him and fled, they were suddenly exposed to a more formidable and immediate danger than the women had to meet. It is, indeed, interesting and consoling to observe that when the first shock of our Lord's arrest and condemnation was over the disciples are found returning to His presence and exhibiting some at least of their old devotion to Him. St. Peter follows Him to the High Priest's house, and though

he yielded to the temptation to deny Him, a bitter remorse was at once aroused in him, and he is foremost in following our Lord to the Cross. Even St. John must be supposed to be one of the disciples, since we are told it was all the disciples who forsook Him and fled; but the text tells us that in a few hours afterwards He was standing by the Cross of Christ, and thus testifying in the most conspicuous manner to his being a devoted disciple of his crucified Master. But once more, of all the devotion shown to our Lord in those bitter hours of agony and shame, the chief and most conspicuous honour must be assigned to the women. "There stood by the Cross of Jesus," says St. John, who was there himself, "His Mother, and His Mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene." It was an awful sight for any woman to witness. The mere spectacle of the horrors of such a crucifixion must have been a fearful shock; and when the sufferer at whose feet they stood was One to Whom they were attached by so deep a devotion, it must have required a supreme inspiration of love to sustain them. But the vision of the Lord's Own Mother standing by His Cross has ever been felt in the Church to be the most profoundly moving spectacle that the world has ever seen. It has inspired the most tragic of all hymns, *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, to which no translation can do justice.

"At the Cross her station keeping,
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
Where He hung, the dying Lord;
For her soul of joy bereavèd
Bow'd with anguish, deeply grieved,
Felt the sharp and piercing sword.

"Who on Christ's dear Mother gazing
Pierced by anguish so amazing,
Born of woman, would not weep?
Who, on Christ's dear Mother thinking
While her Son that cup is drinking,
Would not share her sorrows deep?"

The sight of the Lord's Mother amidst that terrible and cruel scene brings at once its reality and its horrors home to the heart as nothing else could, and the effect is infinitely deepened by her silence and patience. An Apocryphal Gospel describes her as giving utterance to violent reproaches of the Jews, and breaking out into loud lamentations. That is a conception which ordinary human nature would no doubt dictate; but St. John, who was by her side, does not say that she uttered a word, and she seemed to share the infinite patience of her Son. It is natural that her sister, Salome, the wife of Cleophas, or Alpheus, should have been with her, and Mary Magdalene, to whom He had rendered so vast a benefit. The other Evangelists tell us that most of the women stood afar off, looking on; but these four women, specially devoted to Him or related to Him, must have pressed to the front, attended by the disciple

whom Jesus loved and who returned that love with such devotion. It is worth while to meditate on this scene and to call it before the mind's eye—the three crosses, the soldiers guarding them, the Jewish rulers watching in scorn and insult; the crowd afar off, or at some considerable distance; the four tender, but firm and patient women, with the beloved disciple, standing in helpless sorrow and distress at the foot of the Cross, where their best Beloved, to Whom they were bound by the strongest natural and spiritual ties, was slowly dying in agony. There has never been such an execution in the world's history, where the bitterest human hatred and the deepest human love, the most merciless strength and the tenderest patience and humility, are all brought together in one deep and intense tragedy. The fountains of the great depths of human nature are broken up, the windows both of Heaven and Hell are opened; and between the blessed Virgin and the powers of evil who were wreaking their deadliest malice on our Saviour's head, the whole spiritual world—all the forces of good and evil—seem to be revealed.

It is all the more touching and impressive that in the midst of this tremendous scene, our Lord is calm and unselfish enough to address two brief words to His Mother and to St. John, which are concerned solely with His Mother and her future.

It is instructive to recall, at this last word of earthly farewell, what the relation between our Lord and His Mother had been. She holds so reserved and quiet a place in the Evangelical narratives that perhaps the indications of their mutual relations are not always realised adequately. They are all of the same character as is exhibited in the first incident between them, on our Lord's visit to Jerusalem as a child. We there see the tenderest care and solicitude on His Mother's part, and on His Own a preoccupation with the supreme work of His life, the doing His Father's business, but at the same time a loving and filial devotion to her and to Joseph. "Wist ye not," He said, "that I must be about My Father's business?" but He none the less went to Nazareth and was subject unto them. At the marriage in Cana, she is evidently on terms of perfect confidence with Him, not scrupling to make a suggestion to Him, and when He declines it, nevertheless surmising that He was going to take some memorable action, and bidding the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." There is nothing in His answer to her on that occasion which is not entirely respectful. The address, which is unfortunately translated "woman" in our version, being a term of high respect in the original. It is the same word as is used on this supreme occasion when He said, "Woman, behold thy Son," when it

must have been meant to convey the most tender and honoured meaning.

The same motherly and loving care for Him is indicated by the other occasion when she is mentioned. She seems to have been one of the friends mentioned in the third chapter of St. Mark, who went out to lay hold on Him when they heard that He and His disciples were so overstrained by the claims made on Him by the multitude "that they could not so much as eat bread"; and immediately afterwards we are told that His Mother and His brethren "standing without, sent unto Him, calling Him," and He made the memorable exclamation, "Who is My Mother, or My brethren?" and looking round about on them that sat about Him, He said, "Behold My Mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and Mother." There would seem no ground for the interpretation which sometimes has been put upon this exclamation, that He meant to repel His Mother's intrusion. On the contrary, the very words make His love of His Mother and His brethren the highest ideal of all that He could bestow. He could not do more for those who did the will of God than to love them with such love as He bestowed on His Own Mother. There is visible again the confession of supreme preoccupation in His work for His Father, the

predominance of this over all other interests, but at the same time a full response to His Mother's love and devotion. It was all in the same spirit that His Mother in His last agony should come to His side to assure Him of sympathy, if she could do no more, and willingly facing all the horrors of the scene in order to be near Him. The womanly character exhibited in the Gospels in our Lord's Mother, and in all those that were associated with her and with Him, is unique and unmistakable. It is precisely that meek and quiet spirit described by St. Peter in his Epistle, coupled with a fear which is free from alarm and compatible with a gentle strength and firmness. That was the temper of "the holy women of old" who trusted in God.

Our Lord's utterance to her is prompted by the same spirit of gentle homage. "Lady," He says (for so it might be permitted to translate it), "behold thy son." She and St. John were apparently standing together. "When Jesus saw His Mother and the disciple standing by whom He loved," He bade her regard him as her son, and then, to complete the charge, He says to St. John, "Behold thy Mother." It is a strange instance of the perverseness of which commentators are capable that some Roman Catholic writers have actually seen in our Lord's word to St. John, the commendation of the Church as

represented in him, to the perpetual protection of the Virgin Mother. But the very life of the words and the depth and beauty of their meaning, consists in their simple personal sense. How can the Lord's heart have been otherwise than distressed, not merely at the anguish His Mother must then have been undergoing, but at the thought that He was leaving her without His loving companionship on earth? Perhaps the last thought might have been the most distressing. Though the prophecy of Simeon was being fulfilled, that a sword should pierce through her soul, yet we know that she kept and pondered in her heart all the things that were said about Him from His earliest years, and among those things must have been His Own predictions of His suffering and death, and also of His resurrection, and she may possibly have looked beyond that hour of agony to the redemption which it was purchasing, and she, like Him, may have had present to her soul the joy that was set before Him in enduring the cross. But as a great saint, St. Bernard, has observed, there is a farewell in these simple words which is profoundly pathetic, and they, too, must have pierced her heart like a sword. They imply that she was to lose Him. "What a loss!" says St. Bernard, "and what a substitute!" "In the place of Jesus, henceforth thou hast John, in the place of the Lord thou hast His servant;

in the place of the Master, His disciple, the son of Zebedee in the place of the Son of God." The Lord's words mark the transformation which He knew must pass upon His relation with His Mother after His resurrection. He knew that He would rise again, but He knew also that He would rise in a character and a nature which would render the old relations with His Mother impossible. It is, perhaps, the most forcible of all refutations of the perversion which in later ages have placed the Mother of Jesus in a position almost superior to her Son, so that in the Roman Church men are taught to seek His help through her. The Lord Himself treats her as needing the care and devotion of a human being—one of His Own disciples, knowing that the old familiar intercourse must pass away. She was to experience the meaning of St. Paul's words, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more."

It must be felt to be profoundly natural that St. John should have been chosen for this sacred office. Salome, his mother, seems to have been a sister of the Blessed Virgin, so that the charge is natural from the point of view of family relationship, but it is profoundly in harmony with the character of St. John and his relationship to our Lord. The intense reticence of St. John precluded him from explaining definitely the reasons which made him

in an eminent degree the beloved disciple, but we cannot be wrong in seeing the chief reason in the special capacity of that Apostle for love in its highest form. It is the beloved disciple who dwells more than any other on the love of His Master, and who found the whole motive for love in that love. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," is his summary of Christ's life. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another," so that mutual love is the supreme test of a Christian character. St. John's Epistles are a prolonged explanation of the meaning of love, and of its part in life here and hereafter. What can be so appropriate as that the best and most loving of women should thus be entrusted to the charge of the Apostle of Love? "And from that hour," we read, "that disciple took her to his own home." "Had he a home then," asks St. Augustine, "when he was one of those who had left all to follow his Master?" We do not know, but the word "home" is not in the original. It only says that he took her to his own, and St. Augustine answers his own question by saying that he took her to his own care, his own loving offices. After the Lord's ascension we find her in the company of the Apostles in an upper room, "where abode both Peter and James and John and the rest of the eleven Apostles, who all continued with one accord in prayer and suppli-

cation with the women, and with Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with His brethren." Henceforth she is one of that inner circle of the Lord's companions and witnesses, and we hear no more of her. Doubtless she passed away in the spirit of the words which she had heard Simeon utter over her Infant Son, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word."

XXII

WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 45, 46.

WE now pass to the final moment of this awful scene. Our blessed Saviour now enters into the darkest and profoundest depths of His Passion, in which He appears alone with His God and Father. His previous words had been addressed to men, and had been concerned with gracious thoughts for them. His first word was a prayer for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him; His second promised forgiveness and salvation to the robber who was crucified with Him; His third was a testament of love and care for His Mother and for the beloved disciple; and the remaining words revealed the thoughts and agonies of His own soul, and His communion with His Father. He is henceforth alone with His Father, and the entrance on this supreme Passion was marked by a physical portent which must have

been full of awe. "From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour." Much curiosity has been exercised in vain as to the cause of this darkness. St. Luke tells us that the sun was darkened, or its light failed, but there cannot have been an eclipse, for it was the time of full moon, and at that time an eclipse is impossible. The three hours of gloom were concluded by an earthquake, and earthquakes are frequently associated with atmospheric disturbances. But however this was physically caused, it was awefully appropriate to the tragedy which was being enacted. The Light of the World was being quenched so far as men could quench It, and the light of the sun seemed to fade in sympathy with that spiritual eclipse.

Doubts have been raised about the reality of this physical occurrence, on the ground of there being no distinct reference to it in cotemporary historians: but the expression "over all the land" does not necessarily imply more than the land of Israel, and there is nothing surprising in the failure of cotemporary authors to recount events, however startling, in a small country like Judea or even in their own neighbourhood. The same difficulty might be raised respecting the wonderful course of our Lord's ministry, and the miracles by which it was accompanied. One illustration, perhaps, will suffice to show how very

little weight is to be attached to the silence of cotemporary writers on such events. One of the most startling events to our comprehension in the history of those times was the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum by the eruption of Vesuvius in the year 79 of that era. These two important cities were within 200 miles of Rome, and their total destruction must have deeply affected Roman society. Nevertheless, to prove by cotemporary evidence the fact of their destruction in that eruption is by no means easy. Sir Charles Lyell, the eminent geologist, even concludes, "We have no hesitation in saying that had the buried cities never been discovered, the accounts transmitted to us of their tragical end would have been discredited by the majority, so vague and general are the narratives, or so long subsequent to the event." There are, in fact, many momentous circumstances in ancient history for which we have to rely on the testimony of a single historian, and the fourfold witness of the Gospels affords much stronger testimony to the events they relate than can be produced for a great part of ancient history. We may be assured, therefore, of the reality of that horror of darkness which overspread the land of Judea and the scene of the Crucifixion; and it is not the only instance of a mysterious harmony between nature and great spiritual events. There is, doubtless, a closer relation that we can at present

appreciate between physical and spiritual nature. St. Paul tells us that "the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God . . . in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." But the sacrifice which our Saviour was offering on the Cross was the initiation of that final deliverance, and it is no wonder if those great travail pangs were felt in the very frame of nature itself.

During the whole of those three hours, from noon to the ninth hour, the Saviour endured His sufferings in silence, but about the ninth hour the fearful strain both of body and soul reached its culmination. The end was at hand, and He cried out with a loud voice in an utterance which revealed the concentrated agony He was enduring, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is to say, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" It is the most intense expression that could be imagined of the agony of the human soul. It reveals a sense that all support and comfort are withdrawn. In the greatest miseries, men and women have appealed to God in the unalterable trust that He, at all events, could not forsake them. But the Saviour, Whose whole life had been one of trust in God and of communion with God, is brought into so great trouble and misery that it

seems to His human nature as if God Himself had forsaken Him. It seems observable that at this terrible moment He does not use the word "Father," which was first on His lips at the commencement of His agony, when He exclaimed, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do," and which rises to His lips again in His final word, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." It is impossible to penetrate into the full depths of the misery which wrung this almost despairing cry from the Saviour's Heart, and it would be presumptuous to attempt to speak of it in detail; but we may safely make one observation on which several earnest saints have dwelt, namely, that it cannot have been the sufferings of the body alone which evoked this appeal from Him. We may be sure that He realised and felt with intense sympathy the sins of His people, of which He was enduring the bitter consequences. If a father or a mother is brought into trouble by the misdeeds of a son, it is not the mere external injury which is the bitterest part of their sorrow. It is their apprehension of the evil which their son has committed, and the injury inflicted on his soul. The Saviour is practically making those sins His Own. He is enduring their terrible consequences, and as He endures them He realises the deep horror of them, and must feel Himself surrounded by nothing less than a hell upon earth. It must have put

even His trust in God to a severe strain as He felt this hell around Him, and asked, where could be a deliverance from it, either for Himself or for His people, or for mankind at large. I venture to think, indeed, that in some interpretations of His cry, it has been taken in too literal and hard a sense. In particular, some of the great divines of the Reformation have supposed that God had actually forsaken the Saviour, as the representative of all the sins of mankind, and even that God's wrath was for the time abiding on Him. I cannot but regard this as inconceivable. On the contrary, there surely can never have been a time when the Father's pleasure must have rested with greater fullness on the Son than at the moment when, in patient obedience to that Father's will, He was submitting voluntarily to the sufferings which were necessary for the redemption of mankind. But though we must put aside any such extreme interpretation of the cry as this, we may well believe that in the sense of all the evil around Him, of the sins of the whole world which were reeking their terrible consequences on His Head, His agonies of soul as well as of body were so great as to put His trust in His Father to a supreme strain, and that He could only express the depths of His misery by saying that it was as though His Father had really deserted Him.

There is another consideration which must be

borne in mind in contemplating His struggle. He had already undergone severe temptations in the course of His life from the malice of the devil. At the outset of His ministry He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and that narrative ends with the intimation that the devil departed from Him "for a season." In the Garden of Gethsemane, His devotion to His Father had been put to a still severer strain. Three times He had prayed with strong crying and tears that the cup He had to drink might be put away from Him. Is it not reasonable to suppose that these awful hours on the Cross involved a final temptation at the hands of the adversary? It was not mere suffering; it was the maintenance of a deliberate resolve to drink the cup of bitterness of soul and body to the end, notwithstanding the taunts flung at Him, and the suggestions of the evil one. When He heard the taunts, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save," "Let Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the Cross, and we will believe," must it not have needed the most intense resolution to abstain from appealing for those twelve legions of angels, who, as He told His disciples, were at His command? How His human will was strengthened and supported by His Divine Will is a mystery we cannot penetrate; but it is certain from the record of the agony in Gethsemane that that human will had recoiled

from the awful endurance required of it. This cry of the Saviour reveals accordingly a terrible mental and spiritual struggle, rending His very soul asunder even more bitterly than His physical sufferings were racking His body. They became at last almost beyond endurance, and when the end was approaching—when He realised, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that He was about to taste death, His soul burst into this agonising cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

But there is another consideration suggested by this cry which we may welcome as relieving its terrible sadness. If the words had been only our Saviour's, if they sprang from His lips alone and had no other connection, they might have seemed to indicate an unredeemed desolation. But the most remarkable thing about them is that they are the opening words of that Psalm which predicted with such amazing truth the very circumstances of our Lord's Passion (Psalm xxii.). The author of that Psalm, whoever he was—and we do not know—had either in himself or in prophetic vision gone through an experience closely corresponding to that of the Saviour Himself, and when our Lord quoted them we cannot doubt that He had that Psalm in mind. The strange suggestion has been made even by some of the soundest commentators, that the Saviour was in silence actually repeating to Himself the words

of that Psalm. We have no right to read into the narrative suggestions of that kind which go beyond the solemn and sacred text, but when He quoted the Psalm its spirit must have been in His mind, and we are justified in interpreting the secret feelings of His heart by this illumination. There is, indeed, nothing more amazing in the Scriptures than the prophetic character of that Psalm. It is alone more than enough to show that the Scriptures are the products of an inspiration beyond that of any human mind, and that prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but that "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The description, many hundreds of years in advance, of the details of the Crucifixion; the parting of the garments; the piercing of the hands and feet, bespeak a Divine prevision. But this exact correspondence of the Psalm in detail with the circumstances of the Crucifixion must strengthen our conviction that the Psalm as a whole expresses the spirit of the Saviour, and the feelings which were in His heart, when He quoted it at the supreme moment of His agony. Regarded from this point of view, it reveals to our infinite relief the fact, that throughout the agony the Saviour held fast His faith in His Father and was comforted by the assurance of His ultimate deliverance in the blessed result of His suffering. The very words, indeed, of the opening verse which the

Saviour actually quoted revealed that mysterious combination of hope and desperation which often marks the utterances of the Psalmists, though never in so high a degree as in this instance. The cry is addressed not merely to God, but to My God. It is almost a contradiction, one of those contradictions into which the soul often breaks in hours of deep sorrow and agonising experience. The God Who seems to have forsaken him is still His God, and he asserts, in the very despair of His appeal, that God has not forsaken Him. But as you proceed in the Psalm, you hear the undertones of trust and hope gradually rising through the cries of misery and agony, until at length they overpower the sounds of despair, and the Psalmist breaks off with the prayer, "But be not Thou far from me, O Lord. O My Strength, haste Thee to help me. . . . Save me from the lion's mouth; for Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns." The Psalm is the most vivid revelation of a soul passing through an agony like that of the Crucifixion, but in the darkest moments retaining faith and trust in God at the depth of its being, and at length rising into the full assurance of deliverance and peace. Can we doubt that this suffering and reassuring aspect of the Psalm was present to our Saviour's heart when His agony forced its first word to His lips, and that thus the Psalm on which He

must often have meditated sustained Him in His agony?

In point of fact, as an ancient hymn of the Church expressed it, the Saviour was fighting on the Cross a glorious battle, enduring the assaults of all the powers of evil; and intense as was the spiritual as well as the physical strain, He was sustained by being able to look through it to His great victory. Accordingly the Psalm ends with a still more thankful and exultant note, "I will declare Thy Name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. Ye that fear the Lord, praise Him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify Him; and fear Him, all ye seed of Israel. For He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard." "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the Governor among the nations." It is our duty to realise, as far as our feeble nature can, the depth of the agony which our Saviour bore, in order that we may be roused to due gratitude and honour to Him: but at the same time it is a great comfort to be assured by our Saviour's Own reference to this Psalm at the close of His Passion, that the suffering and agony was not unredeemed by the assurance of God's

love and final deliverance, so that the whole truth is rightly summed up in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews that "for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

XXIII

THE LAST WORDS

"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.

"Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth.

"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost."

St. John xix. 28–30.

After our Lord had uttered that loud cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" the close of His agony immediately followed. The four Evangelists supplement one another, and between them we can clearly realise the course of the last moments. "After this," says St. John, "Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." This sentence may be understood in two ways. It might either mean that as Jesus knowing that all things necessary to the fulfilment of the Scriptures had been accomplished, gave Himself up to the death which He felt was imminent, confessed that the last pangs were upon Him, and in this final suffering, said, "I thirst." The other interpretation of the words is, "knowing

that all things were now accomplished," He uttered the cry, "I thirst," in order to indicate that among those things thus accomplished was that thirst of the sufferer which is spoken of in Psalm lxix. 21, "They gave Me gall to eat, and when I was thirsty they gave Me vinegar to drink." It seems to me that this latter interpretation is in many respects a very strange one. Although Psalm lxix. harmonises to a considerable extent with the experience of the Saviour, parts of it are very imperfectly applicable to Him, and it would be strange that one single incident, that of the sufferer's thirst, should be selected as the one which it was requisite to fulfil. When the sufferer in that Psalm is given vinegar to drink, he is also given gall to eat, and it is hard to see why the thirst alone should be selected as typical. Moreover, the giving of vinegar to drink in that verse is mentioned as a cruelty, but there seems no reason to doubt that it was kindness or compassion in one of the Roman soldiers which prompted him to hurry to take a spunge and fill it with vinegar and give it to Him to drink. The vinegar, it is generally agreed, means the thin and sour wine of the country which was the usual drink of the Roman soldiers. Moreover, there would seem something artificial in the Saviour's proclaiming a thirst in order to fulfil one of the secondary circumstances in a Messianic Psalm. It is more natural

to suppose, as I have said, that the Saviour, knowing that all had been fulfilled in accordance with the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, now surrendered Himself to the last weaknesses of nature, and simply confessed His craving for some relief from His thirst. It has been suggested also, not perhaps without reason, that He desired to utter one or two more words, and that He needed this refreshment in order to utter them. Those who stood near the Cross did not understand His cry, "Eli, Eli," and the narrative in St. Matthew and St. Mark represents them as thinking that He called for Elias, and running to lift the spunge of weak wine to His lips as though this would help Him to speak more clearly.

At all events, this word "I thirst," seems a simple confession of the last weakness of approaching death, and when He had received it He cried again with a loud voice, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit," which is no doubt an echo of another Psalm (xxxi. 5), "Into Thy hands I commend, or commit, my spirit. Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of Truth." But St. John tells us that He uttered one more word, "He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head and gave up the ghost." There is one important point in respect to this last word, which is missed in our Authorised Version and perhaps is imperfectly conveyed even

in the Revised Version. This last utterance, "It is finished," is the same word as is used in the previous statement that "Jesus knew that all things were now accomplished, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled." It is not merely that all is finished, but that all is accomplished, all completed, and fulfilled. It is the same word that is used in the eighteenth chapter of St. Luke, where our Lord said to His disciples, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the Prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again." We are told that "they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken." But now all these things had been "accomplished" except the rising from the dead which was to follow, and the Saviour could say, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." All is accomplished: and, adds St. John, "He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost." That word, "He bowed His head," is the last of many other touches in this narrative which tell that it came from an eye-witness. And thus when its object was fully accomplished, but not till then, the fearful scene

is at an end, and the Saviour's Spirit is received into His Father's hands. It remains for us to consider a little more particularly the meaning of these last two words.

First of all, what had been accomplished? St. John tells us that what was in our Lord's mind was that the statements in the Scriptures must be fulfilled. That indeed is the cardinal point in the whole life of our Lord. At the moment when He was betrayed He bids St. Peter put up His sword and says, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray unto My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how, then, shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" In that spirit and for that reason He submitted to His Passion, and He endured that Passion to the end that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. The first word and the last word of the Passion, from His arrest to His death, was the Scriptures. I cannot but observe in passing what a supreme importance and authority this gives to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The Saviour saw in them the whole account of His mission and of His work, and He died in obedience to the charge they laid upon Him. His words on the Cross, which we have been considering, afford a touching instance of the degree in which His whole thought was steeped in those Psalms which He quotes from the Old Testament. He lived in them

and died in them. This is not an occasion on which to consider the bearing which such a fact must have on some modern controversies respecting the Old Testament, but let us at least learn from it that if we wish to be in harmony with the Saviour's mind, if we would fain be imbued with the beliefs and hopes which animated His life, if we would learn to think of God and of others and of the world as He did, we must follow His example by living in the Scriptures of the Old Testament as well as of the New Testament, we must follow more than we have yet done His exhortation to "search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me."

But we must go a step further back. Why was it so imperative that the Scriptures should be fulfilled? The mere fulfilment of them can hardly be the ultimate reason of the endurance by our Saviour of such suffering as He underwent. His whole life and death cannot have had for their ultimate object simply to fulfil what was written in a Book. The reason must be that those Scriptures were a witness and a record of the will of God for the redemption of man, and the Saviour knew that, since they were the word of God, He was carrying out the will of God in obeying them to the letter. The will of God had been gradually revealed in them from the days

of our first parents, from their fall, through the history of the early world and that of the Patriarchs, through the education of the Chosen People and of Abraham and Moses, through the Law of Moses and through the history of the people of Israel in their own country, and in captivity, down to their return, and to His Own Day. Throughout all that long history, Patriarchs and Law-givers, Kings and Prophets and Psalmists had been vouchsafed visions by the Holy Ghost of the manner in which God was guiding His people and mankind, and of the culmination of that guidance and government in the appearance of the Messiah, the Son of God, in the death of which He would be the Victim, and in the salvation which would be wrought by that death. The salvation of mankind, the full establishment of the Kingdom of God, could be wrought out by no other means. It was all foreseen and settled by the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," and the Scriptures, under His inspiration, preserved a faithful record of the successive stages of the process. The need, therefore, for the Saviour to fulfil the Scriptures lay in the necessity of perfectly fulfilling that design and counsel of God. The Scriptures are the guide, the only guide to that counsel, and we may well believe that as a guide they were of infinite comfort to Him. The final stages in carrying out that Will were intensely

bitter, so bitter that human nature alone would have been unequal to bearing it. The agony in Gethsemane and the bitter cry of desolation on the Cross illustrated how even His nature recoiled from it. Although He foresaw it, as is shown in His prediction to His disciples, in actual reality it almost overpowered Him. May we not then interpret His frequent references to the Scriptures as means for sustaining His assurance that all this bitterness and suffering was in accordance with the will of God, and were indispensable if that will was to be carried out? When He reminded Himself that He knew from the Scriptures that His sufferings were to fulfil the will of God, He placed Himself, as it were, in fellowship and contact with that will, and rose from His prayers and meditations with renewed strength and patience. He would realise the experience of St. Paul, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope."

This may and should be the great use of the Scriptures to ourselves. In proportion as we live in them as the Saviour did, shall we learn more and more the will of God for our lives and for the world at large, and shall have clearness of vision and strength to meet the calls made upon us in life. It must be learned by us as it was by the Saviour, through continuous intimacy with that word. We

must imbue ourselves so much with it that our souls may acquire a sort of instinct for the will of God, for the character He would form in us, for the true spirit in which to meet the trials of life, and the true method of dealing with its evils. I am sure it will be recognised that this is not an unnecessary warning in the present day, and perhaps there is no lesson more urgent for us at the present time than that if we would be able to act as He did in full harmony with the will of God, we must be incessantly and thoughtfully studying the Scriptures.

But let us try to go further back and ask whether we can see the reason why it was the will of God that the Saviour should suffer to the last these bitter agonies. For that purpose let us carefully observe one fact, namely, that all these sufferings, this whole history, are simply the natural result of the action of the thoughts and passions of the men of that day. They had indeed inherited certain prejudices and tempers; and so far, the history was the culmination of a long course of human conduct; but what was done was not brought about by any exceptional causes, but was occasioned by the natural working out of human nature and its passions. The whole of the history is summed up in one verse: "that light was come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds

were evil." The result was to show what was the inevitable consequence of this disposition on the part of human nature. It was the casting out from them the very incarnation of goodness and truth. The more we meditate on that simple and broad fact the better shall we realise the true character of human nature, and the operation of God's tender love towards mankind in requiring our Saviour to endure to the last, the consequences of that terrible fact. Human nature—ordinary human nature—is looked upon in a very favourable light in the present day, and there are, thank God, no heights of moral and spiritual beauty, even of Divine beauty, to which with the help of God's Spirit it cannot be raised; but what human nature is without the goodness and supernatural aids of that Spirit has been shown conclusively, once for all, in the Crucifixion of our Lord. I have reminded you often before that we can hardly remember too much that this revelation of human nature had been foreseen by the deepest philosopher of the heathen world. Plato had predicted that if a really perfect man appeared in the world he would be hated and cast out of it, and would be put to death by a punishment like that of crucifixion. It is the most marvellous of all instances of human insight, apart from the Spiritual revelation of the Scriptures. That prediction of the philosopher is what we have been seeing realised in the life and

death of our Lord. The one supreme characteristic of Him is that He was a witness to the truth, to the truth of God, the truth of man, and that He brought the light of that unshaded truth to bear on the hearts of men, alike Jews and Romans, and that they rose in revolt against it.

Now let us further realise that this disastrous result must have been reached in the ordinary course of the development of human nature if it had been left to itself. In the ordinary course of moral law God leaves men to learn what evil means by enduring its terrible consequences, and the consequences of the rejection or extirpation of truth and goodness among mankind must have been the utter ruin of all society; and it is evident from the history of the world at large in the time of our Lord that that ruin was imminent; but our Saviour, by Himself coming forward to endure those results, and so bringing into full light the nature of the consequences of human corruption, has revealed to the world and to the universe the fearful consequences of human evil. He has endured to be Himself made to all time an awful example of it, and thus He has Himself suffered the punishment which would otherwise inevitably have fallen upon human nature itself. He has borne the punishment and the consequences of human evil, to an extent which human nature could not have borne them. He has thus made

an atonement for that evil, and at the same time He has established by His example, and by the gift of His Spirit which He has won for us, the means of resisting the evil and overcoming it. No wonder that after making such a sacrifice and such an atonement, and fulfilling to the last His Father's will, He can bow His head in perfect peace and trust, that He could add the word "Father" to the verse which He quoted from the Psalm, and that His last words should be "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." "To Him, therefore, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, let us give continual thanks, submitting ourselves wholly to His holy will and pleasure, and studying to serve Him in true righteousness and holiness all the days of our life."

XXIV

THE WITNESS OF NATURE

"Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."—ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 54.

OUR last meditation was upon our Lord's final words upon the Cross, when He said "It is finished," or accomplished, and then bowed His Head and gave up the ghost. So far as our Lord's Passion and Sacrifice were concerned, all was over; but events immediately occurred which showed that all was not over, and that our Saviour's death had not been the conclusion, as the Jewish rulers hoped, of His power and influence. St. Matthew proceeds, in a passage which is generally recognised as marked by a sort of poetic grandeur, "And, behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the grave after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." The moment of our Saviour's death was thus marked by a convulsion

of nature of a very violent kind. It is not merely that the earth did quake, but the rocks were rent, and graves, or rather tombs, were opened. The word "graves" gives, perhaps, an erroneous conception, and the Revised Version substitutes "tombs." The tombs referred to were, in fact, like our Lord's own tomb, hewn out of a rock and closed by a stone. So in the case of Lazarus we are told that the place where he was laid was a cave and a stone lay upon it, or rather against it. The earthquake, therefore, would lay open the cave by moving the stone, as was the case in our Lord's Own resurrection, when there was a great earthquake, and in or by means of that earthquake, the angel of the Lord came and rolled back the stone. The effect of this earthquake upon the minds both of Jews and of Gentiles, like the soldiers, would be to convince them that a great supernatural Power was interposing, in sympathy with the solemn fact of our Lord's Passion and death. Throughout the Bible, and particularly in the Psalms, earthquakes are regarded as special manifestations of God's power for the overthrow of His enemies, and the execution of judgment. It was in harmony with the other great events of our Lord's life that His death should thus be accompanied by a conspicuous natural manifestation. His birth had been announced by the miraculous appearing of a star which guided the wise men from the East.

His Baptism was accompanied by a Voice from Heaven, which was again heard at His Transfiguration, and towards the close of His life, when a Voice was again heard from Heaven, the people that stood by said that it thundered. Throughout the Bible, it is a conspicuous mark of the special action of God for great spiritual purposes that miraculous natural manifestations should accompany them. The giving of the Law on Mount Sinai amidst thunder and lightning, is the most conspicuous of all instances. It would seem impossible, in fact, to bring home to the minds of ordinary men the fact that a great spiritual power is at work, unless they are shaken from their indifference and complacency by some physical shock.

Perhaps the most remarkable instance of this necessity is the descent of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It was not sufficient for the new spiritual Power to be displayed in purely Spiritual Agency, but there must be a sound also of a rushing mighty wind, which filled the house where the Apostles were sitting, and cloven tongues must appear, like unto fire, which sat upon each of them. For a similar reason, the tremendous spiritual convulsion involved in our Lord's death was impressed upon the very senses of those who witnessed it by this earthquake, and by the portents which accompanied it. No one who was present at that scene could fail to realise the witness of nature and of

nature's God that a tremendous event had occurred, and that our Saviour's death was not the passing of an ordinary spirit from this world. As St. Matthew says, "When the centurion and they that were with him, saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly."

But two portents accompanied the earthquake of a profoundly significant character. In the first place, "the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom." From the fact that that portent alone is mentioned by all three Evangelists, we may perhaps conclude that it was the most important and significant of all. We are told that at the hour of evening prayer on the day of Preparation, which was the hour and day of our Lord's death, it was the duty of the officiating priest to enter by the door within the thickness of the veil which separated the Holy of Holies from the Priests' Court, into the space between two immense curtains; he then opened the golden door of the Sanctuary and rolled back the outer curtain, then the priest and the people who were in the outer Court looked up and saw the inner curtain rent from top to bottom, leaving the Holy of Holies open. Such a spectacle must have made an immense impression upon those who witnessed or heard of it, and there is a notice in the Talmud which records the bursting open of the great door

of the Temple forty years before the fall of Jerusalem, or about this time. It must be remembered that our Lord had been specially associated with the Temple. He had said, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." He spake of the Temple of His Body, and His meaning was to intimate that His Body was the eternal Temple in which the Presence of God was from henceforth to abide, while the Jews understood Him to imply some overthrow or supersession of the old Temple. The belief of the Jews in God's presence and covenant with them, was, as it were, embodied in the Temple, and any injury to it seemed to them like a violation of the very centre of their religious faith and hope. The rending of the veil of the Temple throughout, and the opening of the Holy of Holies, involved an immense shock to them, and there can be no doubt of its profound spiritual significance. It is clearly explained to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews in the ninth chapter, "After the second veil," says that Apostle, there was "the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the Ark of the Covenant overlaid round about with gold . . . and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat." "Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God: but into the second went the High Priest alone

once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people : The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the Holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing. . . . But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building ; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His Own Blood, He entered in once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." The rending of the veil indicated that there was henceforth to be no veil to separate the Holiest of All from God's people. Our Saviour, by His sacrifice and by the Blood He shed, had superseded all offerings required under the old covenant, and thus established perfect freedom of access between man and God. The rending of the veil was thus a vivid and speaking parable. It could not be a mere consequence of the earthquake. The veil was of immense thickness and strength : it can only have been by a special miracle that it was rent from top to bottom ; and that rending bore witness of the abrogation of the old Law and the old covenant, and the substitution of the Temple of the Body of Christ for the old material Temple in which alone God could be approached by the Jews.

The second portent mentioned by St. Matthew

is equally eloquent of the consequences of our Saviour's death. "The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept were raised, and coming forth from the tombs after His Resurrection, they [that is, the Saints] appeared unto many." This has been thought in some quarters to be difficult of belief, but the positive testimony of St. Matthew cannot be rejected except upon grounds which would invalidate all miraculous occurrences. That a body which had lain in the ground for days could be reanimated and reunited to the living soul had been shown by the raising of Lazarus; and so far as the physical possibility is concerned, the resurrection of our Lord Himself is proof sufficient of the possibility. As the saints who thus resumed their bodies are said to have appeared unto many, it is natural to suppose that they would be only those who had recently died and who would be known to those to whom they showed themselves. It is natural to ask what became of them; but the same question might be asked respecting Lazarus, and in both cases we must be content to remain in ignorance. The collocation of the words in St. Matthew would seem to imply that while the stones which closed the mouths of the caves were moved away by the earthquake, it was not until after our Lord's own resurrection that the saints thus resumed their bodies as He had done. It is in

accordance with His Own example that they did not appear to the people generally. Our Lord's Own appearances after His resurrection were confined to His Own disciples. As St. Peter said to Cornelius, "Him God raised up the third day and gave Him to be manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead." The appearances of these saints was therefore similar to that of our Lord, and to those to whom such appearances were vouchsafed a great confirmation must have been given to the witness of our Lord's Own Resurrection.

St. Matthew and the other evangelists then proceed to mention a very remarkable result of these manifestations. "When the centurion and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." St. Mark, with one of the slight touches of an eye-witness which distinguish him, says that the centurion "stood over against Him." This centurion, therefore, in command of the party of soldiers, had not been standing aside while the execution proceeded, but had stood over against our Lord, watching Him, and we can in some degree imagine what an extraordinary experience it must have been for him, and what deep impressions must have been made on his mind and heart

by all our Lord's bearing and words. As he witnessed that combined patience and gentleness and majesty, and heard Him utter words which appealed to God as His Father, he must have realised that a new vision was open to him of a soul of perfect truth and meekness and faith. The very word "Father," more than once repeated, was itself a revelation, the most vivid revelation possible of the God Who was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He could not but know that He had been condemned for proclaiming Himself the King of the Jews and the Son of God, and the conviction must have been growing in him that He had been unjustly condemned. He exclaims, therefore, as St. Luke reports, "Truly this was a righteous Man," and as a righteous Man His testimony respecting Himself must be accepted as true, and it followed that He was the King of the Jews and the Son of God. But when this impression had been produced on his mind, and on those who watched Jesus, there suddenly occurred the earthquake which bespoke the interposition of the very Hand of God in indignation at the crime that had been committed, and a profound awe and fear seizes upon the mind of the centurion and of the soldiers with him, and they exclaim together, "Truly this was the Son of God."

This scene is, in fact, the culmination of the manifestation of our Lord's nature and character.

He had been indeed so manifested by many signs and miracles and by many Divine words in the course of His life, but the effect of the Crucifixion with all that accompanied it was to manifest Him in circumstances of a still more vivid character. He is manifested in conflict with the most exacting form of human suffering and agony. The Son of Man and the Son of God is here exposed to the keenest and most terrible trials by which the soul of man can be tested, and the spirit in which He met and bore them illustrated a more Divine manifestation than had ever been seen. Had He allowed His sufferings to be mitigated, had He exerted His Divine power to save Himself from them, we could not have had the supreme spectacle of the soul of One Who was God and Man in the midst of the last miseries of human nature. But when we see and hear Christ as it were *in profundis* calling to God out of the depths, the last evidence is afforded of His perfect Divinity as well as humanity. Yet, perhaps, there was still one thing wanting. Could He be really the Son of God if He endured all this misery and injustice without any manifestation of the Divine power which must be inherent in Him? We cannot say. But when at the close of this manifestation of every attribute of Divinity except power, that power is suddenly exhibited so that the earth did quake and the rocks were rent, then the centurion and they

that were with him felt that the manifestation was complete, and they exclaimed, " Truly this was the Son of God."

Do we not see in this scene and its conclusion a vivid example of the manner in which the Cross of Christ, and all the circumstances accompanying it, appeal to our faith and draw all men unto Him ? Men are placed, to a certain extent, in the position of this centurion when they contemplate in the narratives of the Gospels, the Passion and death of our Lord. That is the purpose of the services of the Church during this week. Day by day we are watching Him. Day by day His words and His suffering impress themselves upon our souls, and draw from us the conviction of His Divine as well as human character, and lead us to His feet in penitence and hope. But one thing is necessary, as it was with the centurion, to complete our faith. It is an essential part of the grace manifested on the Cross that our Lord could, if He would, have saved Himself from it ; but we can only be assured that He possessed that Divine power by the fact that He did in the end assert it, and that He was raised from the dead by the power of God. Then it is that we are able to exclaim in full assurance and faith, like this centurion, " Truly this was the Son of God."

XXV

THE SACRAMENTS OF WATER AND BLOOD

"And He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."—ST. JOHN xix. 35.

ST. JOHN alone relates two distressing incidents which immediately followed our Lord's death. "The Jews," he tells us, "because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day (for the day of that sabbath was an high day) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away." No doubt they had not waited until the Crucifixion was over to make this request, for our Lord died at the ninth hour in the afternoon, and there would have been little time for such arrangements. They must have gone to Pilate in the course of the day while the Crucifixion was in progress, as they realised the possibility of a ritual regulation of the Jewish Law being interfered with. It was a rule of that Law that the bodies of those who had died by hanging should be taken down before evening, that they

might not hang as a curse upon the land. It was one of those acts of reverence and humanity of which the Jewish law is full. The Romans often allowed bodies to hang upon the cross in corruption, or to be devoured by birds. It was not uncommon for men to live for days upon the cross, and so we are afterwards told that Pilate marvelled when told that our Lord was already dead. Perhaps, in the whole history of the condemnation and death of our Lord there is nothing more shocking than this ritual scrupulosity on the part of the Jewish Rulers. There is nothing, at all events, which exhibits in so terrible a light the depth to which human blindness and self-deception can go. These men had for months and years been deliberately closing their eyes and their hearts to the Divine goodness of our Lord, to the words of truth which He delivered to them from His Father, to the moral and spiritual illumination which He poured upon them: in the end they had paid money for His betrayal to one of His Own disciples: they had endeavoured to procure false witnesses to bring Him under sentence of death: they had degraded their authority and the independence of their nation before Pilate in order that their envy and hatred might be gratified by His suffering a form of death which only the Roman Governor could inflict: they had taunted and insulted Him as He hung upon the Cross: they had, in a word,

"cast out the Son of God and put Him to open shame": and in the midst of it all they are punctilious about a point of ritual observance, and beg the Roman Governor to protect them from a breach of it. There is no such instance, perhaps, that the outward observances of religion may be scrupulously kept while the heart is blinded by passion, and is betrayed into the vilest sins. It was, no doubt, a peculiar danger of an elaborate ceremonial law such as was prescribed for the Jews, that it should so absorb men in attention to its details that their observance should become in their minds a matter of more prominence and importance than the spiritual realities of righteousness and judgment. The perfect holiness and patience of our Lord seems to bring into vivid light the vices and corruptions of those who murdered Him, and we have in these scenes of the Crucifixion visions of depths of human wickedness and of heights of human and Divine righteousness, exhibited in the most glaring contrast to one another.

When it was desired, as on this occasion, to ensure the more speedy death of crucified persons, the cruel method in practice was that the legs and arms of the sufferer were broken by a mallet, which was such a dreadful aggravation of their sufferings as to hasten their end, but it was also customary to follow it by what we call a *coup de grace*, by a sword or lance. By requesting that

this course might be taken the Jews, therefore, exposed our Lord to this terrible aggravation of His agonies: but He was saved from it by His unexpected death. "The soldiers," St. John says, "came and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs; but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water." For the truth of these two things St. John adds the special asseveration, "He that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe," and he adds his reason for making this special asseveration, "For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken. And again another Scripture saith, They shall look on Him Whom they pierced." It is evident from this earnest asseveration of St. John that he regarded these two incidents of the Crucifixion as of special importance, and we ought to endeavour to realise their importance and significance with him. We may, no doubt, say, in the first place, that it was a gracious provision of God's will and God's overruling providence that the last cruel marring of the Saviour's Body should be avoided. It was ordained, as St. Peter said, "by the determinate

counsel and foreknowledge of God" that our Saviour should drain to the dregs the cup of physical and moral suffering on the Cross; and in the striking phrase of the Epistle to the Hebrews, He tasted that death to the very last dregs; but when He had done that, and had borne the witness to the truth which that involved, it was but just and fitting that His Body should be spared any subsequent indignity. A soldier with a spear pierced His side, to make perfectly sure of His death, but that was like the wounds in His hands and feet, which did not mutilate Him.

That is one reason which we may be permitted to entertain for this action of God's providence; but St. John mentions another which he regards as of the chief importance. The Scriptures had said, "A bone of Him shall not be broken." The Scripture thus quoted is the direction for the preparation of the Paschal Lamb, in the twelfth chapter of Exodus, "Neither shall ye break a bone thereof." Why, we must ask, was it of such immense importance as St. John evidently feels it to be, that the treatment of our Lord's Body should correspond in this respect with that of the Paschal Lamb. To appreciate this, we must take note of the profound importance to the Jews of the fulfilment of prophecies respecting the Christ. The Jews, we must remember, were right in the immense awe with which they looked upon the

authority of their ancient history and ancient Scriptures: they were right in realising that the ordinances of their nation, its ceremonial observances and its sacrifices had been given them by God Himself, through Moses, with the most awful sanctions, and that they constituted a special Divine revelation which had been granted to their race for the good of mankind. It was essential, therefore, that any further revelation which might be brought to them by our Lord should be in harmony with that ancient law, and should not contradict but fulfil it. Now the Paschal Lamb was well understood to be appointed to pre-figure the ultimate sacrifice which should ultimately be made by the Messiah. It was a prophecy that that sacrifice would be made, and the details of the Paschal sacrifice were intended to pre-figure the real Sacrifice. If, therefore, the Jew was to be persuaded that our Lord was the promised Messiah Who should make that sacrifice, it was essential that the circumstances of His death should be in harmony with the ceremonies prescribed for the Passover.

It should help us to realise this truth the better if we bear in mind that in instituting the Lord's Supper to be the Paschal sacrifice of Christians, our Lord expressly recalls the nature of that ceremony. It was with the Paschal Lamb lying before Him that He said to His disciples, "This is My Body" and

"This is My Blood," as much as to say, "These elements of bread and wine shall for you be the representatives of the Paschal Lamb, and of My Body and Blood which that Lamb pre-figures." We may see the importance of this particular prophecy if we consider the method of argument by which the Apostles appealed to the Jews. What they had to show, as throughout the Acts of the Apostles, was that Jesus—the Jesus Who was crucified—was the Christ, that He was the Messiah Who had been promised to the people; and for this purpose they were mainly concerned to show, by reference to the Old Testament, that Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled the prophecies respecting the Messiah which were contained in those sacred Books. "St. Paul mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." It is remarkable that in order to convert the Jews the Apostles did not appeal mainly to the miracles of our Lord, but to the correspondence of His acts, and particularly of the circumstances of His death, with the predictions of the Prophets. The starting ground of the Apostles, as of the Jews generally, was the Divine appointment of the Jewish Law and the inspiration of the Prophets. Nothing could be true for them; nothing could be accepted as a further revelation, which was not in harmony with this original revelation, and which did not fulfil

it. That, we should observe, is the reason why St. Matthew as well as St. John, clutches, so to say, at every detail in our Lord's life and actions which reminds them of their ancient law and their ancient history.

For those of us who would follow the Apostles, a profound lesson seems to be taught by this inspired example. If there be any tendency to treat the history, the legislation, and the prophecy of the Old Testament as of secondary importance, it is utterly out of harmony with the example of our Lord and His Apostles. To their minds one Divine will and hand guided and controlled the whole course of Jewish history, so that it pointed and led up to the final revelation of Jesus Christ. The same correspondence with prediction is observed by St. John in the fact that the side of our Lord was pierced by the soldier's spear. That prophecy, in the twelfth chapter of Zechariah, was as follows: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced"; and it is remarkable that the Talmud referred this prophecy to the Messiah. The prophecy and its fulfilment sank very deeply into the mind of St. John, and he quotes it in the solemn introduction of his Book of the Revelation, "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see

Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen." This piercing of our Lord's side was thus, as it were, an identification of Him as the Messiah to the mind of a faithful Jew.

But this wounding of our Lord's side was accompanied with another circumstance which impressed itself with equal depth upon St. John's mind. When His side was pierced, he said, "Forthwith came thereout blood and water." There has been much inquiry and discussion as to the cause and the meaning of this phenomenon. Two eminent doctors, Dr. Stroud and Dr. Haughton, convinced themselves and convinced many others that it was the natural consequence of the piercing of the pericardium, when the heart had been strained by the agonies of crucifixion; but they have not convinced some of the best and most authoritative commentators, such, for instance, as the late Dr. Westcott. The ancient Fathers of the Church seem to have regarded the occurrence as miraculous, and from the stress St. John lays upon it it would seem that he also regarded it in that light. Dr. Westcott appears to regard it as evidence that the prediction was fulfilled that our Lord should not see corruption, and that the elementary forces of a new life were bestowed on Him even after the ordinary death of the body. It is difficult to decide between these conflicting

authorities. It was enough to St. John that the phenomenon brought vividly to his mind the fact that the two great characteristics of our Lord's life and work were symbolised by the two elements of water and of blood which flowed from His wounded side. It becomes to him in its turn something like a prophecy of our Lord's future work, as well as a symbol of the past. In his First Epistle he treats the water and the blood as the very essence of our Lord's character and work, "Who is he," he said, "that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness because the Spirit is truth." Certain it is that these two elements have ever since constituted the symbols of the essential action of our Lord. They are the central symbols of the two sacraments, in which the whole message of the Gospel is concentrated. Water is inseparably associated in Christian thought with the washing of regeneration of which Baptism speaks, the cleansing of the soul from dead works to serve the living God; and the Sacrament of the Holy Communion speaks to us of the Blood of Christ in its twofold aspect—as shed for the forgiveness of sins, and as the life-blood of the regenerated soul. Water and blood are thus the earthly symbols of the two greatest

realities of the regenerated and eternal life, and it is our Lord's death and sacrifice which has given them that significance. We cannot wonder that St. John should seem deeply touched when the final manifestation of the Saviour's death upon the Cross brought these two essential elements of the spiritual life before his eyes, and that he should endeavour to confirm both our belief and his own by the solemn asseveration of the text. From this point of view the manifestation is certainly a fitting conclusion to the awful history. The Saviour leaves us, in His pierced Body, a silent witness of the work He has accomplished and will yet accomplish, and He seemed to St. John to bid him remember that it is by blood and water, by the Baptism of His Spirit, and by the communion of His Body and Blood, that the benefits of His death and Passion are conferred upon us.

XXVI

THE BURIAL IN LOVE AND FAITH

"And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,

"Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the Kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.

"And Pilate marvelled if He were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether He had been any while dead.

"And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.

"And he bought fine linen, and took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen, and laid Him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre.

"And Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Joses, beheld where He was laid." ST. MARK xv. 42–47.

WE have now passed through the vale of humiliation through which our Lord consented to be led, and the first gleams of His glorification began to be perceived. He had, indeed, to pass through the grave, but it was an honoured grave, and His sacred Body was saved from the indignity of a common burial. His death, moreover, instead of finally destroying the allegiance of His friends, proved a starting point of new impulses of love and hope among them. Immediately after His death, a member of the Jewish Council, Joseph of Arimathea, resolved to give Him an honourable

burial. He is described by St. Luke as "a good man and a just," who had not consented to the counsel and deed of the Jewish authorities. He was, in fact, as St. John says, a disciple of our Lord, but secretly so for fear of the Jews, and he was waiting for, or expecting, the Kingdom of God, which no doubt he thought our Lord would introduce. But now, after the Crucifixion, he overcame that fear, and went in boldly unto Pilate and claimed the body of Jesus. It was an act, no doubt, of great courage under the circumstances. The Jews, who had been able to crucify our Lord, might be supposed to be able to avenge themselves on any one who publicly repudiated their action, and this fear of the Jews was evidently a powerful influence throughout the days which followed our Lord's death. When our Lord subsequently appeared to His disciples, the doors were shut where they were assembled for fear of the Jews. The Jewish authorities not only had great power to punish their opponents, but were actuated by intense malice and fanaticism, and the subsequent martyrdom of Stephen shows the danger to which the followers of Jesus were exposed. It was, therefore, an act of real boldness in Joseph of Arimathea that he should go straight to Pilate and arrange for the honourable burial of our Lord. But after he had done this he was joined by another man, who, like himself, had been a disciple

of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, namely, Nicodemus, who early in the Lord's ministry had come to Him by night. He had the courage, when our Lord had been summoned to a meeting of the Priests and Pharisees, as narrated in the seventh chapter of St. John, to protest against His being judged without a hearing. "Doth our law," he said, "judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" They answered him reproachfully, "Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." It would seem remarkable that both these men, hesitating and timid before our Lord's Crucifixion, should be moved by it to throw their fear aside, and to take the bold step of publicly honouring our Lord's body. The Jews had apparently defeated and crucified our Lord. What was there in that result to infuse new courage into those who had been timid disciples?

There was, however, one aspect of the Crucifixion which might naturally have had this effect on two members of the Council, who, even if they were not present at the meeting when our Lord was condemned, were doubtless aware of what passed, and of what our Lord had said. After all the false witness brought against our Lord had failed, the issue had turned on His answer to the direct challenge of the High Priest, to say whether He was the Son of God, the Christ. The High

Priest, according to St. Mark, asked Him, "Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" and Jesus said, "I am, and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the Right Hand of Power and coming in the clouds of Heaven. Then the High Priest rent his clothes, and said, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy. What say ye? And they all condemned Him to be guilty of death." Our Lord, therefore, went to death in consequence of His deliberate and solemn claim to be the Christ, the Son of God. His patient endurance of crucifixion, therefore, constituted His final and solemn attestation of this claim. That claim of our Saviour was directly attested by the blood of the Cross, and it was the highest and most solemn attestation that could be offered. It remains to this day His supreme witness, and it ought to be borne in mind, even at this time, that any one who refuses to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He will hereafter return in all glory and power, is refusing to believe the solemn oath which our Lord attested by His blood, deliberately shed in bitter agony. Is it not very possible, however, that this consideration might have finally overpowered all doubt and hesitation in the minds of two men like Nicodemus and Joseph? that Joseph may thus have been forced to believe that the Kingdom of God for which he was waiting, had

come, and that Jesus of Nazareth was the King He claimed to be? Certainly there never was such a witness borne to any fact or truth in the world, as that which was borne by our Lord's patient death to the claims He had asserted: and in the action of Joseph and Nicodemus we seem to see the Cross beginning to exert its victorious power of drawing men to the Saviour's feet. Since, moreover, it was well known to the Chief Priests (as a subsequent incident shows) that our Lord had said while He was yet alive, "After three days I will rise again," that saying would have been known to Joseph and Nicodemus, and the faith and trust which had been aroused by our Lord's endurance of death would embrace that statement also. When this assurance was fulfilled by our Lord's rising again, the combination of the two—the witness of the Cross and the witness of the Resurrection—formed the combined attestation to our Lord's claim at His trial, and the two together produced that outburst of faith which followed the Day of Pentecost.

There is another illumination which this action of Joseph and some of the attendant circumstances throw upon our Lord's position. In a great part of His actions as narrated in the Gospels, He seems to stand so much alone, or at least at so great a height above all others, that we are apt to think of Him as apart from ordinary human society and

fellowship; but these scenes at the Cross bring out the gracious fact that He was surrounded not merely by the Apostles but by a very considerable circle of disciples, friends and acquaintances who were very deeply devoted to Him. Joseph and Nicodemus are not likely to have been alone in their attitude of sincere though partly concealed belief, and there were many who had more openly followed Him. The Cross brought many of these followers to Him, and St. Luke tells us "all His acquaintance, and the women that followed Him from Galilee, stood afar off beholding these things." The phrase "all His acquaintance" cannot reasonably be understood to mean that all the people whom He had known were there, but it certainly implies that there were many of them. Still more conspicuously were there many women who not only came to the Crucifixion and stood afar off, as they were no doubt obliged to do by the soldiers, but who followed to the very Cross itself. St. Matthew says that "many women were there beholding afar off, who followed Him from Galilee, ministering unto Him, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the Mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children." St. Mark says, "there were also many women looking on afar off, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Salome (who also when He was in Galilee followed Him

and ministered unto Him), and many other women which came up with Him unto Jerusalem." St. John tells us that "there stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother and His Mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas and Mary Magdalene."

What this reveals to us is a large circle of friends, men and women, by whom our Lord was always surrounded with reverence and affection, and that the women in particular ministered to Him in various gracious ways. It would appear that they ministered to Him of their substance, and surrounded Him with a reverential and tender devotion. It should be noticed as a special feature of our Lord's character and influence that He commanded to so great a degree the reverential affection of women. A gracious group surrounds Him. His Mother, who followed Him to the Cross itself, received from Him there the final expression of His tender care for her, when He said to her, "Woman, behold thy son," and to the beloved disciple, "Behold thy Mother." Next to her, and doubtless attracted partly by her influence, is the gracious group mentioned in these last scenes, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, Salome the mother of James and John, Mary of Bethany who sat at His feet, her busy and hospitable sister Martha, Mary Magdalene whom He had healed of a demoniac possession, the sinner who washed His feet with her tears of penitence and wiped them with

the hairs of her head. All these are found lingering round the Cross, and being the first at the open sepulchre. It is, I think, a unique example in the lives of the greatest men. Far as He was above them all, He nevertheless found help and solace among them. His influence was felt by them all as rousing them to a higher life and nobler hopes; and with an absolute absence of any familiarity they are attached to Him by the deepest devotion. His experience has had an infinite effect in lifting the whole ideal and position of women, and those who thus followed Him to the Cross and the grave have introduced a new life and glory into the lives of all women since. We have been following our Lord through horrible scenes of malice, violence, cruelty, and hatred, and it is an immense relief to be thus reminded of the gracious circle of honour, reverence, love, and affection amidst which His life moved, and amidst which His body was laid in the tomb.

But so it has always been in the history of the Church. However hostile the world may have been to Christianity, however indifferent it may be as a whole at the present day, there are now, and there always have been, a circle of loving and devoted believers, men and women, who have believed and loved the Saviour, and whose spiritual life has consisted in that devotion. It is, in fact, the main characteristic of both the Jewish and

the Christian religions—but of the Christian religion in a supreme degree—that every relation of life and every obligation is transformed into an obligation of personal love. It was so in the Jewish religion. Our Lord said that all the law, all the obligations of men and women, were summed up in two commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." We find this love the highest characteristic of the Psalms. "I will love Thee, O Lord my Strength," is a typical exclamation of the Psalmists. It was not a love for an abstract ideal; but God had revealed Himself in the deliverance of the people out of Egypt; and by other various deliverances He had exhibited His Own character in the laws which He laid down for His people. He spoke to them as a righteous and loving Person, and He called on them to love Him and for His sake to obey His laws. It is, however, a supreme form of this love to which the Saviour calls us. The final discourses of our Lord to His disciples exhibit this characteristic of our faith in the simplest and most intense form. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments," may be taken as the supreme account of a true Christian's life. Whatever commandment it may be, whatever obligation, whatever submission to the Divine will,

all is transformed by these discourses of our Lord into the supreme spirit of love to Him.

Perhaps it is a revival of this central passion of love to our Lord which is needed for the purpose of any such religious revival as we are now hoping for. The two disciples who buried our Lord with reverence and honour, the women who watched at the Cross and lingered at His sepulchre, were doubtless exercised by many fears, anxieties, and uncertainties. The sight of our Lord's suffering and death must have been an immense strain upon their hearts, and the future was obscure to them, but they clung in faith and love to Him, and their whole heart and soul was absorbed in a longing to follow Him. They could not but keep His commandments because they loved Him. That is the only influence which is adequate to support men against the severest forms of temptation, and to sustain their faith and hope amid such strains as are now being put upon our faith by the experiences of an awful war. Let men and women realise that the love of Jesus Christ, and with His love all His power and grace, are at their command here and hereafter, provided only they love and trust Him in return, and they have an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast, which will not fail them. There never was such a moment of distress for the world as the moment after the Crucifixion, when the incarnation of all that is true, holy and

pure had been cast out of it at the instance of professedly just men, with contumely and hatred: but the love of Christ was so rooted in the hearts of some of His disciples, and particularly in the hearts of the women who followed Him, that they bore that strain, and became the germ of the Kingdom of God in the world.

Thus it was that at the very grave of the Saviour the dawn of a new life was foreshadowed. As the dreadful scenes of Golgotha pass from our sight, we see two Jewish councillors with their faith confirmed, reverently taking His Body from the Cross, wrapping it in linen, and laying it in a new tomb which no other human body had occupied; and a company of devoted women who followed Him and beheld the place, and where His Body was laid, and who returned to prepare spices and ointments, and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment. Is there not something symbolical in St. John's concluding description, "Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid"? It was to prove, if needed, a new garden of Eden, in which a new Paradise was to be created.

XXVII

THE SEPULCHRE AND THE LORD'S RESTING-PLACE

"So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch."—ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 66.

THERE remains one incident to be considered respecting the burial of our Lord, which is recorded by St. Matthew. "The next day, that followed the day of the preparation (that is the Sabbath), the Chief Priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first." It is noticeable about this action that it was taken on the Sabbath, notwithstanding the fact that there was no point on which the Jewish authorities complained more persistently respecting our Lord, than that He broke the Sabbath, though it was only by performing works of mercy. Yet their fear of Him was so great that they themselves broke the Sabbath in a

conspicuous manner by going to the house of Pilate, to procure the immediate appointment of a guard for the sepulchre. They had asked that the death of the sufferers might be accelerated lest the Sabbath should be defiled by their remaining on the Cross, but they did not shrink from the moral defilement of entering the Prætorium on that very Sabbath Day in order to ask a favour from Pilate, whom they addressed as "Lord," to protect themselves against an imaginary fraud which they supposed the disciples might commit. But the design defeated itself. Pilate gave them a contemptuous consent, "Ye have a guard—or, take a guard—go your way, make it as sure as ye can." "So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, the guard being with them." But by setting that guard, instead of obviating the possibility of our Lord being supposed to have risen, they provided witnesses of that resurrection, and consequently unimpeachable evidence of it. After our Lord had risen, St. Matthew tells us, "Some of the guard came into the city and told unto the Chief Priests all the things that were come to pass." Their own witnesses came and told of the resurrection, and their final act of self-deceit and hardness of heart was that they continued to deny our Lord's resurrection although they had this unquestionable and independent evidence of it. We are told that they

bribed the soldiers heavily to say that "the disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept"—an impossible story from the mouth of Roman soldiers, but the story was spread abroad among the Jews and continued, as St. Matthew tells, unto the day when he was writing.

But this brings into prominence one most remarkable and important fact respecting the expectations which were entertained of what would follow after our Lord's death, alike by the Jews and by the Apostles themselves. It is evident that notwithstanding what our Lord had said to them, the disciples had no expectation of His rising again. St. John tells us, in connection with his own first visit to the sepulchre, that "as yet they knew not the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead." That confession of St. John is clear proof that no such expectation or hope existed in the disciples. Our Lord had indeed told them more than once; but they were in the condition described after one of those declarations, "the saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things that were spoken." The same thing is evident from the preparations made for His burial alike by Joseph and Nicodemus and the women. Nicodemus would not have brought myrrh and aloes about one hundred pound weight if he had imagined that our Lord would leave the tomb before forty-eight hours were past.

Similarly the fact that the women went down to the sepulchre on the third day with spices and ointments which they had prepared, shows that neither they nor any of the Apostles and disciples with whom they were in communication, had any idea that our Lord would not be in the tomb. The Priests and Pharisees were guarding against a perfectly imaginary danger in thinking that the disciples might be tempted to steal His body away, in order to fulfil the prediction of His rising the third day. The very thought of such rising was not in their minds. There was thus no expectation on either side of what actually occurred, or of anything approaching it. Perhaps it is not wonderful that the disciples had failed to appreciate our Lord's prediction, for what really occurred was absolutely unprecedented in its nature and could never have been imagined before the fact. We, of course, as we read our Lord's prediction to them, apprehend its meaning at once, but that is because we have before us the reality which explains it; but before the event it would have been impossible to imagine it, especially in the case of a person who had suffered such a terrible death as crucifixion. It is the more important to dwell on this fact of the absence of the expectation of the reality on either side, because it disposes of all suggestions as that the story of our Lord's subsequent resurrection was due to the imaginary

realisation, in visions or otherwise, of what the disciples and others had been longing for. There is no sign that they longed for it or dreamed of it, and their narratives are therefore only to be explained by the fact that the events they narrated actually occurred.

The Lord's Body, therefore, is now left in the grave, watched with devoted reverence by the women and some of the disciples, and officially guarded by the Priests and their Roman guard ; and the hours that followed were filled with intense grief on the one side and apprehension on the other. But before passing from the thought of where the Body was laid, we cannot but ask one other question respecting His soul. Where was His soul ? It had left His Body : of that there could be no doubt. Where had it gone ? That is a question which every thoughtful man must ask, and it is answered by the article in the Creed, which says, " And He descended into Hell." It need not be explained that the word " Hell " in this statement does not mean the place of condemned souls. The language is founded on the inspired statement of St. Peter in his speech on the Day of Pentecost, in which he applies to our Lord the words of the Psalm, " Thou shalt not leave my soul in Hades, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." The souls of men when separated from the body must pass into some state of existence

apart from the body. That state or place was called by the Greeks "Hades" and by the Jews "Sheol," and the Creed tells us that our Lord's soul shared the experience of other souls in this respect. As His flesh did not see corruption, by virtue of that promise of the Psalm, though it remained in the grave until the Resurrection, so His soul remained in Hades, that place of departed souls, until its reunion with the body. That is a belief full of comfort to Christian souls. It assures them that when their souls, or the souls of those dear to them, pass from their bodies, they are undergoing the very experience which Christ Himself underwent; and that we may therefore confidently look forward to the day when their souls, like His, will be re-united with the flesh and will enter as He did into a new life. It would be to anticipate the narratives of the Resurrection, upon which I hope we may meditate, if God spares me to next year, to enter more particularly into the full meaning of this promise and hope; but the thought of the Saviour's soul having passed through the experience of all other men in this respect, and then resuming a new life, may enable us to contemplate with patience and hope the state of the souls we love who have now passed away. They are where He has been, and His Spirit is doubtless with them.

THE END

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